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UFFICIO STORICO

MARIO MONTANARI

LE OPERAZIONI
IN AFRICA
SETTENTRIONALE

VOL. I - SIDI EL BARRANI

(Giugno 1940 - Febbraio 1941)

2^a Edizione

ROMA 1990

GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMY
HISTORICAL OFFICE

MARIO MONTANARI

OPERATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA
VOL. I-SIDI EL BARRANI
(June 1940-February 1941)

2nd Edition
ROME 1990

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PRESENTATION
2nd Edition

The first edition of "*Operations in North Africa-Sidi el Barrani*", volume I, published in 1985, was quickly sold out within a few months.

The continuous and broad application of the book being submitted later, he led the staff of the army to give course to this second edition.

To make the work more agile and easier consultation, the topographic maps of the first edition have been replaced by ideographic, more detailed sketches and uniforms, entered properly in the text.

THE HEAD OF THE HISTORICAL OFFICE

PRESENTATION

1st Edition

This monograph about Italian army in North Africa during World War II was born from the need to harmonize the series of works already published by historical Office on this subject over the years shortly following the end of the conflict, but still quite a "hot shot", then in precarious conditions for documentary requirements for archival and reordering in shortage of sources, especially foreign ones.

The previous series, drawn not so much according to a temporal progression adhering to the development campaign as operating according to the availability of reliable and experienced authors, provides timely information-undoubtedly the first of kind in Italy-however not free of inaccuracies and blunt dissection, however broadly justified by the purpose of the document, however, as soon as possible, "the unfortunate events but not worthless to our unit in the African theatre.

Now, General Mario Montanari-military historian said, known and appreciated for balance, critical spirit and incisiveness-was asked by the Historical Office to present standardized the campaigns in North Africa, which mature by now need to overcome previous monograph intention which-I repeat-to and was considered only "first approach".

The complete works, in the intentions of the General staff of the army, will be divided into four volumes, of which three concerning the operations in the Libyan and Egyptian theatres and one for Tunisia.

This study-the first of the new series-, identified with the title more meaningful and immediate initial operating cycle-"Sidi el Barrani" precisely-includes and integrates the first two books of the previous series: "In North Africa, in preparation for conflict and advance to Sidi el Barrani" and "the first British offensive in North Africa (October 1940-February 1941)", published respectively in 1955 and 1964.

The study also-in order to deepen the genesis of the most crucial strategic decisions-is not limited only to the close and regular technical and operational analysis, but widens the field of investigation political-military aspects of both sides in the fight, according to a methodological criterion more adherent to the needs of the times and of opinion.

Events and characters are considered with detached objectivity, without indulging in easy criticism nor the exaltation rhetoric. Trying instead of illuminating the causes originating the decisions and the circumstances under which the commanders and troops had to re work. No hasty convictions, therefore, but peaceful demonstration of human error in difficult times.

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CONVENTIONAL SIGNS

used in sketches

Were employed unit markings currently in use by the Italian army, namely:

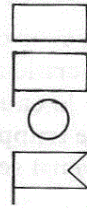
1. Basic Symbols

Unit

Command

Logistical Installation

Logistical Command



2. Arms Symbols

Infantry

Mechanized Infantry

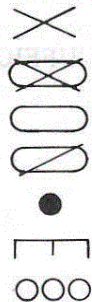
Armor

Armored Cavalry

Artillery

Engineers

Motorized Troops



3. Status Symbols

Army



Corp



Division



Brigade



Regiment



Battalion or Group



Company or Battery



To indicate a complex tactical using the symbol above the symbol of rank



4. Indication of the units

To the left of the base symbol has the numeric code corresponding to the symbol represented rank and unit code right where you placed the Department in question.

Es. 2  5 Indicates II Bn. of the 5th Inf. Rgt.

5. Indication of nationality

Where necessary, to the right of the symbol are used the abbreviations IT: Italy; Ge: Germany; UK: United Kingdom; AU: Australia; NZ: New Zealand; FR: France; Po: Poland.

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Common Topographical terms found in Cyrenaica

AGFA = hole, cove.

AGHIRA = small cultivated basin, employed in front of an name is pronounced aghiret or aghirt.

AGLA opp. **Ogla** = meeting of small pools.

AIN = source, fountain, sink. Literally it means eye.

ALEM = border, mountain or high hill.

ALG opp. **Algh** = channel, hole, throttling of the Wadi.

ARGUB pl. **Araghil** = hill, coast, buttress of mountain.

BAHAR or Bahr, pl. **Buhur** = sea, **baja**, lake, river.

BATEN = depressed ground, wide flat valley; depression between two escarpments.

BIAR, same as Abiar (pl. of Bir sink).

BU = father, place where it abounds...the ... see the word **Umm**.

BIR = deep sink, pl. **Abiar**.

BUER = small sink, diminutive of **Bir**.

BURG opp. **Borg**, from the Latin *burgus* = strongly, castle, fortified house, solid construction in stone.

CHEF, pronounces gross of **caf** = cliff to peak, crest to peak, cove.

DAHAR = wide mountain back, back, plateau, plain.

DAR = stretches, room, house, palace, residence, etc etc (pl. **diar aduar and dor**).

ELUET = height, hill, elevated terrain. It is striven for hill... for **es. Eluet Abdalla** = Height of Abdalla.

GABR = interment, tomb; pl. **gbur**, pronounced also gobur.

GADIR opp. **Ghedir**, pl. **Ghedran** = pool, pond (also a very immense one), water shoal, marsh, swamp, tank, rain water collector.

GARA = height, hill isolated in means to the sands.

GASR = castle, fortified house, village encircled by walls and similar; **pl. gsur**, dim. **gser**.

GEBBANA = cemetery, pl. **gebaden** or **gebbanat**.

GEBEL = mountain, mountain chain; pl. **Gebal**.

GESIRA or best **gezira** = island, in sense a much extended, why peninsula can indicate also, or a island of canes in means to a swamp, or a island of palms.

Got, pl. **Guat** opp. **aguat** = embedded spacious land; well watered and fertile valley; small shelf put to cultivation; small oasis. In Cirenaica it means especially plateau, shelf and it is pronounced **gaut**.

GUBBA = cupola, small nail head to cupola, erected on the tomb of some marabout. Sometimes it means "arc".

HAGFA = hole, cove, pl. **hagheifat (Hagfet et-Tarada** = Cove of the pursuit).

HAGIAC and not **agage** = hill, undulation of the land, dune (**Hagiag er-Rih** = Hills of the wind, sand dunes amassed from the wind); **Hagiar er-Ramla** = Hills of the sand.

HALGH = (bottling) = channel, hole, narrowing of the Wadi.

HOSC = house, fencing, small farm, pl. **Hiscian and Hiasc (Hosc er-rih** = The house of the wind).

HISCET = brambles, thorn bush, "denseness of a forest", land with dense vegetation.

MAATEN, pl. **Maaten** = place of rest for the cattle near the waterhole; drinking trough.

MARSA = port, anchorage. A point from the coast can far away be sure that communicates with the sea for means of determining land. Therefore **Marsa Soluch** = Port of Soluch; it is a point of the coast which can be made or the traffic can make head from Soluch towards the sea (**Marset el-Hilal** = Port of the new moon; **El-Mresa** or **El-Mreisa** = the small port).

MENGAR = full water sink with the tight orifice; reservoir basin.

MENGAR = tip, cape.

MERG, pl. **Murg** = prairie, marsh and swamp.

MERGHEB = hill, height; pl. **Mragheb** (means also sentinel).

MOFSEL, pl. **Mafasel** = step.

MOGARA, pl. **Mogair** = cavern, lair.

RAHEIBA = immense and wide space, cultivated earth, basin, public square (**Raheibet Belgardan** = Basin of B....).

RAMLA = warehouse of sand, cumulus, heap (**Ramletat** or **er-Ramletat** = the heaps of sand, the small dunes).

RAS, pl. **Rus** = head, point, top; peak, tip, head, promontory, principle, point of origin and similar. It is said therefore also of the point in which begins a wadi.

RUES, dim. of **ras** = small hill, small full of rocks hill. pl. **ruesat** Knolls of the small castle).

SANIA, pl. **Suani** = literally means " sink to water-wheel, sink, often encircled by a garden or from a garden, of waves in toponymic the meant one of garden, garden, to farm; dim.

Suenia (**Santet Zetnuba** = Garden of Z....).

SCIAABA = Run of water between sands; ravine, crack, crack recorded in a mountain; pl.

Sctaab.

SEBCHA = lake, briny pond; shoal submerged during the winter and of summer in part desiccated and reduced to lagoon brackish. It grossly comes called **Sbocha**.

SEIED (opp. **es-seted, es-sated, as-sated**) = has the same value of **sidi**.

SENIET = Same as **saniet**.

SIDI = word composed of two elements: **sid**, gentleman, head, landladies and **i**, pronominal possessive " of me "; he means " my gentleman ". He finds himself thickest premised to the name of some marabout. He is to mean place where the marabout is buried... Some time instead of **sidi** it meets **es-seied**, opp. **es-saied**. **Sidi** in the common language is used like in French " monsieur ".

SILCH = " wire ", therefore " line ", via path; pl. **Siluch**.

SIRA = via, way, road. In Cirenaica it has the meaning of heap, stone hill or stony " hill " (**Sira el-Hamra** = the red hill).

SUANI, pl. of **Sania** = garden, garden, to farm.

SUENIA, dim. of **Sania** = garden, garden, to farm.

SUERA = dim. of **Sira**.

SULBIA or **es-Sulbia** = " the chest ", the depositor, the back of a mount.

SOLUCH = " the ways ", point in which converges various ways.

TARIGH, opp. **Trigh** = road, way, via; pl. **Trugh**, or **Tergan** or **Tergat**.

WADI = from the original meaning of " valley ", " bed of a water course " (nearly always dry, except in the season of rains), passes to that one of " river, course of water ". Meant others: " way, via, valley of flow of the plain water ". Plural: **Uidian**, opp. **Uidian**; dim. **Udei**; in place of **udei** small run of water is often used **scetib**, that it means " small valley exactly, during rains ".

UIDIAN (for **uidan** opp. **utdian**) = one of the shapes of the pl. of **Wadi**.

UMM, nearly synonymous term of bu, its true meaning is "mother", and in topographical it takes that one of place from..., abundant place in... (**Umm el-Hagel** = Place of the pellets; **Umm Sala** = Place of cliffs).

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Translators notes:

I would like to take a moment to clarify this work. I do not claim authorship and this is a translation done with software designed for that task, while I did proof read through the work, something's remained unclear. The software chooses the most common usage for a word, while the author may have meant something else. This work is written for a college level reading skills, plus there are often cultural references or idem which I often miss. Also the text is full of spelling mistakes, likely due to poor proof reading of the original work or where the printer dropped or added a letter. As well as my difficulty with Italian word endings which in Italian indicate who's taking actions or a about who the action refers. I think I compensated well, but it was a learning experience, so I got better as the work progressed. Or I hope so. This project has taken as of this point fifteen years, and this book (Volume 1) was the first to be done some 15 years ago now (2000-2001). At this time I found its file formatting obsolete which when the format was updated it lost any text formatting and had to be reproofed, which led to some chapters being updated, unfortunately there has not yet been time to redo the entire volume.

I have retained the Italian command titles, for example using Comando Supremo instead of Supreme Command. All the powers had their own supreme commands so it was easier to identify which supreme command is being referred to when its in that countries language, besides it meaning obvious. Below the Supreme Command there were various high commands or Comando Superior. These were the supreme regional command, and I used the Italian language version. Also please remember the Italian Armed Forces at this time are also "Royal" forces. So the "R" before the command symbolizes this. To be clear R. Esercito (Royal Army), R. Aeronautica (Royal Air Force), R. Marina (Royal Navy). So I used the Italian form so not to confuse them with their British counterparts.

I also retained the Italian forms of place names. Since I used the drawing from the books, I needed to retain the names used in the text for clarity. This applies mostly to town names, while countries, islands and famous locations used common English, hoping that same notoriety would impart clarity.

The purpose of this project was and is to understand went wrong. For some decades I dismissed the poor performance of the Italian armed forces simplistically due to them being "Italian". All the works I read on the Second World War were in English and presented their biases of the authors about the Italian Armed Forces. Most were concerned with actions of the Germans or the British Empire, and the British Official History and other British authors of the time really did not treat Italy fairly. Germany was the real threat, due to the impotence of the Italian war effort. Not that they were wrong, and the rampaging monster in Europe was Germany. Which brings me back to Italy, why was Italy so impotent? The Italians are a brave and self-sacrificing as anyone else, their Armed Forces are just as professional as anyone else, so why was Italy so poorly prepared and equipped for the war?

I would recommend the following for additional understanding.

John Gooch's "Mussolini and his Generals" Cambridge University Press 20007 answered many questions, especially the last three chapters. In summary, Italy's unpreparedness was known to Mussolini and due to his greediness he jumps into a war unready because in that moment the war seemed won. And the moment passed. Hitler is often and rightly condemned for his territorial ambitions. Mussolini's were just as great, where Hitler's territorial ambitions were reasoned and could be logically argued. Mussolini's were unfocused; he had ambitions on all his neighbors, with no logical reasoning. Recreate the

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Roman Empire? Exploit the weak to enrich myself, or you do not respect me; all Illogical, emotional, and amoral arguments.

John Joseph Timothy Sweet's "Iron Arm", Gleenwood Press, London England 1980 & by attribution Shepard B. Clough's "The Economic History of Modern Italy", New York, Columbia University Press 1964. Both go into the background of Italy and bring context to the state of the country. The author of the History of Operations did not spend time with background information. Honesty, it was beyond the scope of his work, but his work is out of context otherwise.

Finally, a note about the Italian Army at this time, in an effort to improve the mobility of the major units the Italian Army adopted a formation known as Division Binary, or a Infantry Division with two regiments. The Division also lost some support units and had only one regiment of artillery. Today we would call this a mixed brigade. The Italian command was well aware of the lightness of the formation, but for some reason retained the title of Division. As a guess on one hand, national prestige was measured by the number of Divisions it possessed. On the other hand, you need a General Officer to command a division, hence more Divisions the more Generals needed, and the number of Divisions just increased by one third. In practice you needed two Divisions binary and some extra artillery and support units (ie. a Corp.) to equal an allied Division.

Also note the artillery in use by the Italian Army is lighter then what was in general use by other armies in the period. The 75 mm. gun which made up many artillery batteries was replaced by mortars in most armies or with larger caliber guns.

Lastly, pay close attention to the links, the time needed to send and receive instructions and how it was delivered. The Italian Army had a lot of difficulty talking with its units and between units in the field. Communications were not sure or swift. This is an issue of critical importance at times.

Robert M Denny Jr.
August 2015

Chapter One
THE MILITARY SITUATION ON 10 JUNE 1940

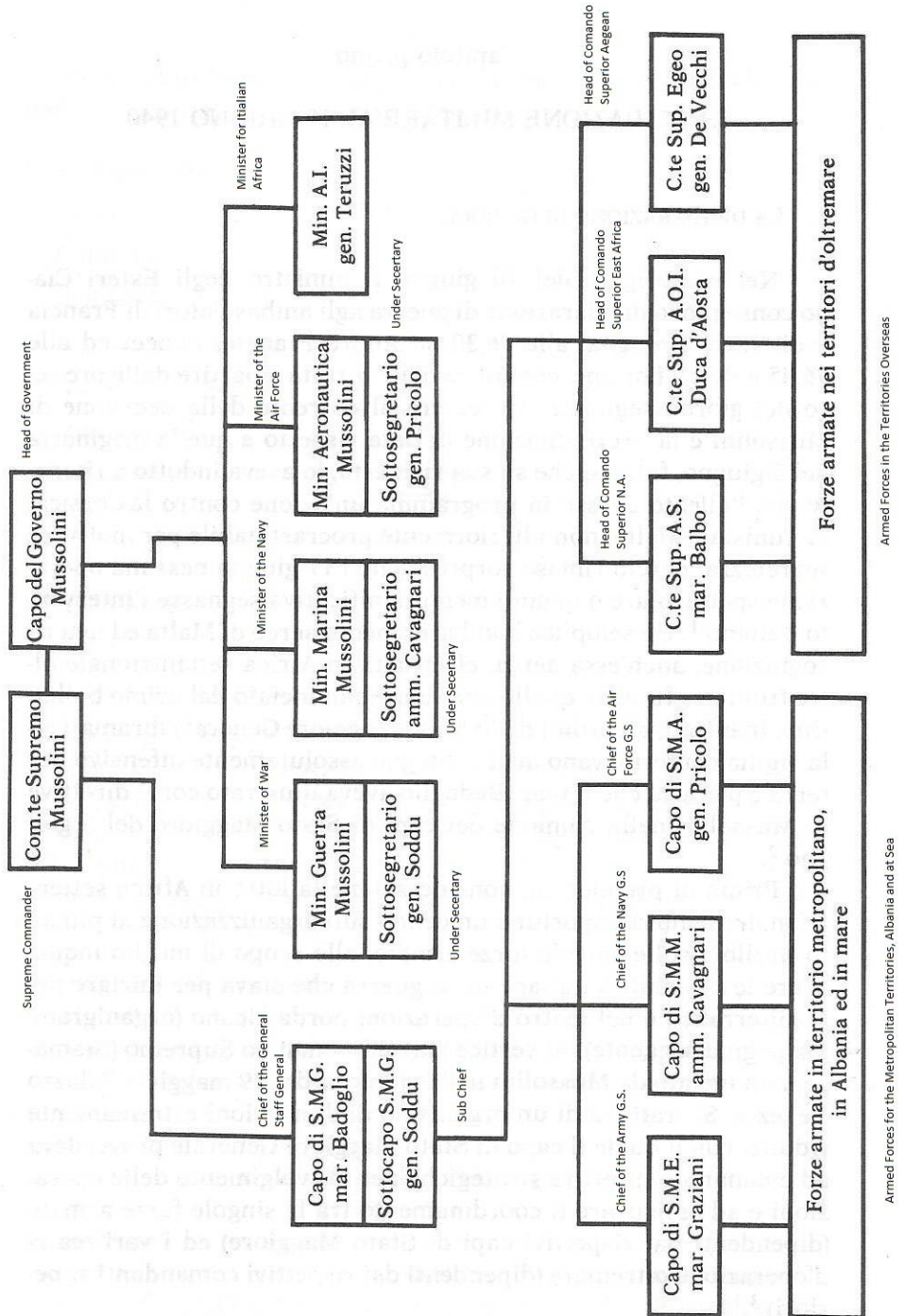
1. THE DECLARATION OF WAR.

In the afternoon of the 10 June the Foreign Minister *Ciano* delivered the declaration of war to the ambassadors of France and Great Britain: at 16:30 to *Andre François -Poncet* and at 16:45 to *Percy Loraine*, with beginning of hostilities to start from hour zero of the following day. *Hitler* knew of *Mussolini's* decision and the short delay of date regarding that original of 5 June, made also on his demand, it had induced him to think that his ally had a program for action against Corsica, Tunisia or Malta, not ulterior or secret reasons to postpone, therefore it remained strange that on 11 June no spectacular or at least meaningful operation marked the Italian participation⁽¹⁾. A simple aerial bombing of Malta and a reconnaissance, even only aerial, carried out in North Africa beyond frontier was all that was announced in the first bulletin. In effects, the circulated orders of the Joint Chief of Staff on the eve confirmed that absolutely defensive behavior for land, air and the sea. *Badoglio* had exemplified the directives of *Mussolini* in the meeting of the Chiefs of the General Staffs on 5 June⁽²⁾.

Before taking in consideration the fight in North Africa, a signal seems opportune on the organization to the highest level and on the single Armed Forces, in order better to frame the Italian possibilities in the war that was in order to begin in the Mediterranean and the theater of operations North African (organization chart following page). He was at the apex of the Comando Supremo (Stamage) announced by *Mussolini* in the meeting of 29 May at Venice Palace. It was be a matter of an organism of dimensions extremely reduced, with which the chief of General Staff supplied to emanate the strategic directives for the development of the operations overseas and to assure the coordination between the single Armed Forces (employed from the respective chiefs of general staff) and various theaters of operations (employed from the respective superior commanders).⁽³⁾

The conduct of the war, exercised by order of *Mussolini*, would not

The Structure of the Comando Supremo in 1940



would not have introduced particular difficulties if the instrument for directing it had been structurally suitable rather than reduced to one simple secretariat; the coordination of action instead covered a much greater complexity, in part because, as was said, the Comando Supremo did not possess an organic answering formulation and in part because until then the R. Marina and R. Aeronautica had enjoyed a more or less emphasized autonomy by effect of the duplicate assignment, undersecretary of State and the chief of general staff, covered from their more elevated representative. For the R. Army the things were different because of the lack of linking of functions, therefore while the issues of naval and aeronautical disposition usual were directly discussed and resolved between *Mussolini* and the interested undersecretary-chief of general staff, those concerning the land forces were nearly always treated by *Mussolini* through of the chief of General Staff or of the undersecretary for war. The constitution of the Comando Supremo was late regarding the necessity to achieve the indispensable strategic sensibility "earth-sea-air" in the modern conflict. Not deriving a potential ground war concept and, almost by natural consequence, the unsatisfactory formulation of the sea and air problems of the central Mediterranean and the very insufficient and generic concrete cures dedicated to inter-forces cooperation. And as a note the aforementioned cooperation damaged at the beginning, and not a trifle, being in existence in each of the Armed Forces serious chasms of regulating, organizational, administrative and logistic.

The General Staff of the R. Esercito (Superesercito) exercised action of command on all the units mobilized in Italy (1,076,940 men) and Albania (70,290 men), it is worth noting in three army groups and the strategic reserve. In particular, Army Group West, in Piemonte, faced France with the 1st and 4th Armies, for total 22 Divisions; Army Group East was turned towards Yugoslavia with a deployment that covered the Veneto reached Lombardy and Emilia and comprised the 2nd, the 6th and (from 12 June) the 8th Armies for a total of 20 Divisions; Army Group South had to supply protection to southern Italy, the islands and Albania with 12 Divisions. The reserve of the General Staff, located in central Italy, was hardly limited to the 7th Army constituted from 4 Divisions⁽⁴⁾. The overseas operating responsibility was entrusted to the local Superior Armed Forces Commanders (C.S.F.A.), as they had major units deployed outside of the metropolitan territory

and they received directives only from the Comando Supremo: in Libya there was found the 5th and the 10th army for 14 divisions (207,630 men total), in East Africa there was two national divisions and 28 colonial brigades (255,950 men) and in the Aegean one reinforced division (24,140 men). Finally, the units not mobilized in Italy did come under the jurisdiction of the ministry of the war, that supervised the administration of the entire army.

At the head of the naval forces based in the metropolitan territory was the General Staff of R. Marina (Supermarina), which it was up to give general directives, to emanate blanket orders of operation, to circulate information on the approximate movements of friendly and enemy ships and to designate senior commanders at sea, The Supermarina subordinate commands of squadrons or naval forces and the coastal commands (commander in chief of the departments and naval military command). In short all the functions of command for the war in the Mediterranean strongly were centralized, but the conduct of tactical action, was entrusted to the highest commander at sea, that is to the most senior in rank or the first commissioned if of equal rank between the commanders of the ships participating in the same operation, independent from their organic belongings. These in theory had a certain autonomy: on the base of the information furnished them from Rome he could, *in case of evident and urgent necessity*, act on initiative and to ask for reinforcements directly from the Supermarina or from the coastal commander or from the naval squadrons. It's not that, in practice, he turned out bound by the accuracy of the orders and the operating dispositions that reached him, After all, the senior commander at sea, even if commanding a fleet, was excluded from the study of the operations which he came to be entrusted, assumed the role of simple executor with most insufficient decisional powers and change of the situation at sea was founded in conditions of uncertainty of the unexpected on front every if he did not receive new and timely instructions from the Supermarina ⁽⁵⁾. The naval forces essentially were constituted by two main formations ⁽⁶⁾. The 1st Naval Squadron, massed at Taranto, comprising the 5th and 9th the battleship divisions, the 1st heavy cruiser division, the 4th and 8th light cruiser divisions and six squadrons of naval destroyer, for a total of 13 heavy ships and 24 naval destroyer. The 2nd Squadron, located at Naples, Messina and Palermo, was formed by the 3rd heavy cruisers division, the 2nd and 7th light cruisers division and by four squadrons of naval destroyers, for total 10 cruisers and 16 naval destroyer.

Naval directive zero (DI.NA.zero), issued 29 May, began with the hypothesis that the adversaries assumed the initiative, thanks to their numerical and qualitative preponderance, carrying out actions against our operations in the channel of Sicily and the Dodecanese and generically against the Italian lines of communication. They reached the decision to assume a defensive attitude in the western and eastern basins of the Mediterranean and offensive-counteroffensive in the central arena in order to prevent the union of the enemy fleets. While to the light ship and the submarines was entrusted the wearing down of the French-English ships by means of incursions and ambush, to the ships of the line it was suggested an operating criteria imprinted with caution. The Document ⁽⁷⁾ placed in evidence two concepts, The first, based the hypothesis of the war, asserted that Italy upon entrance onto the field at the beginning of the conflict precluding every possibility of surprise and, conversely, made to think possible immediate hostile actions from the allied side. As implicit support of this thesis, a very debatable one was the unavailability of suitable means of offense: aircraft carriers, naval means of assault, amphibious means, torpedo bombers, parachutists; but in truth the discourse was capsize. If since 1938, after the crisis of Monaco, the planning had taken in consideration and accepted the principle to open the hostilities with a sudden intervention against Malta or Alexandria, determination of will could have imposed a timely *ad hoc* inter-forces organization -aircraft carriers aside, since the formulation of their program were by now too much late -and is legitimate to think feasible an initial move apt to considerably improve the force ratio or to damage the British flow of reinforcements. *"I do not know why - Adm. Cunningham commented. -the Italians had never tried to obstruct the Suez Canal nor ruin the port of Alexandria at the beginning with one ship timed to explode "*⁽⁸⁾ and in effects would have been very difficult for the English to prevent one or two ships loaded with ammunitions or concrete being blown up blocking the channel and giving concreteness to the beginning of hostilities ⁽⁹⁾. The second concept was translated into the guideline that to engage their greater naval forces was hardly possible and before the enemy was reinforced, in other words expressed the conviction that time worked for the allies. But such guideline was controlled by the prescription to avoid, on the whole, to face decidedly powerful naval formations. From the examination of the forces counterpoised in the Mediterranean on day of 10 June it is quickly seen that Italy was found with a heavy disadvantage in heavier ships

and had the same heavy advantage for lighter ships:

SHIPS	ITALY⁽¹⁰⁾	GREAT BRITAIN⁽¹¹⁾	FRANCE⁽¹²⁾
Battleships	4	4	5
Aircraft Carriers	-	1	-
heavy Cruisers	7	-	7
Light Cruisers	12	10	7
Destroyers	67	35	40
Torpedo Boats & lesser	71	-	16
Submarines	115	12	42
Totals	266	62	117

Perhaps but a comparison between availability separately and the forces is less eloquent a picture that accounting for their locations:

SHIPS	Eastern Basin	Center Sector	Western Basin
Battleships	4 French ⁽¹³⁾	4 Italian ⁽¹⁵⁾	4 English ⁽¹⁶⁾
	1 English ⁽¹⁴⁾		1 French ⁽¹⁷⁾
Aircraft Carriers	-	-	1 English ⁽¹⁸⁾
Cruisers	10 French	19 Italian	9 English
	1 English		1 French
Destroyers	37 French	57 Italian	26 English ⁽¹⁹⁾
			3 French

This situation seems to immediately show with greater clarity the possibilities offered by control of the inner lines supported from the positioning of the channel of Sicily and by a aggressive war of attritions. Helps also to place in prominence a particular element of comparison. To the substantial caution in facing a naval crash from Italian side contrasting with an attitude much more resolute from the British side. *"we never did give thought of the force of the Italian fleet -Adm. Cunningham wrote-The number of the Italian battleships varied, according the reports, from three to five, arriving sometimes to seven. We had the maximum confidence that the fleet of Alexandria would have been in a position to confront if the Italians*

had decided to give battle" ⁽²⁰⁾. The probably a feeling affirmed by the acquaintance of events, but, finding reply in the movements of the Commander in Chief of the *Mediterranean Fleet*, it can be accepted an indication of a real offensive spirit supported by the absence of doubt of approval of the Admiralty. That it cannot be said to exist within the Italians.

Air Force operations were controlled by the General Staff of R. Aeronautica (Superaereo), exceptions made for those overseas, controlled by the Armed Forces High Commands of North Africa, the Aegean and the East Africa. Of the four theaters of operations in which they could be called to act, three were controlled directly from Rome: the Western Continental Theatre comprising southern France, the Eastern Continental comprising Yugoslavia and Greece and the Mediterranean Theatre having a zone of action the same Mediterranean and all the territories that were possessed, mandated or allied to the side of the Franco-English system, including Turkey. The East Africa was clearly on its own being for obvious reasons of distance, of difficulty of communications and the peculiarity of strategic situation. The allocation of tasks to the major aviation units was fixed on basis of the foresaid territorial divisions, The Western Continental Theater of operations was covered by the 1st Air Fleet (Po valley), with the 4th Bomber Division and the 2nd Fighter Division, and the 3rd Air Fleet (Lazio- Tuscany), constituted from the 3rd Bomber Division and 8th Fighter Brigade. The Eastern Continental Theater of operations (Veneto) was covered by the 6th Bomber Division, the Air Forces of the 4th Aerial Zone (Puglie) and Albania, The Mediterranean Theatre was entrusted to the 2nd Air Fleet (Sicily), formed from the 3rd Bomber Division and 11th Bomber Brigade and the 1st Fighter Division, the Air Force of Sardinia as well as to those of Libya and the Aegean Air Forces. The aviation for the army was comprised by 37 aerial observation squadrons, that for the navy by 19 squadrons and 4 coastal sections for maritime reconnaissance.

Altogether, on June 10th was on the line 1,332 bomber aircraft, 1,160 fighters, 497 aerial observation and 307 maritime reconnaissance, inclusive of not ready aircraft or in repair ⁽²¹⁾, Confining ourselves to considering true and proper combat aircraft, according the information at the time the adversaries could have employed against Italy 1,018 bombers (900 French and 118 English) and 1,349 fighters (1,160 French and 189 English), but herself was dealing with estimates of uncertain value. Of the rest not even after the

conflict has it been possible to reach a sure figures ⁽²²⁾. For certain, however, the French were by now totally absorbed by the attempt to check the German invasion and in southern France evidently very little here was usable, in North Africa it seems were only remained one fifth usable aircraft and in Syria 36 modern aircraft. On the other hand the English had altogether 208 bombers and fighters at the bases of Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt and in the Middle East ⁽²³⁾, beyond the 20 aboard the aircraft carrier *Eagle*.

In order in a generalized manner to conclude the short review of Italian possibilities, it is necessary to consider also the operating commitments. Leaving from part the European sectors, the R. Esercito employed a fifth of the own forces in Libya but with a decidedly defensive task; the R. Marina could devote in total to the Mediterranean, but in short limited to guarantee the control of the channel of Sicily; R. Aeronautica, whose doctrine also not identified with the theories of *Douhet** stretched to an own war, was found with half of the aircraft bound from bombing and fighters to the European sectors, approximately a quarter put off center to the Armed Forces High Commands of North Africa (five independent wings and three groups) and in the Aegean (little more than one wing), and only remaining effectively to the hand for the fight in the sky of the Mediterranean: the nine wings more four groups of the Sicily and the Sardinia. With these availabilities it had to guarantee the dominion of the air, to support the operations of the fleet, adding to them the necessary to the wings of Libya in favor of land operations in that theater of operations. Not wanting myself to estimate the adequacy or lack of the strategic employment or the tactical struggle, but to just to observe the absence of the indispensable premise to coordinate the aims of the employment of the Armed Forces and, as against, emphasizing the gravity of the negative factors here: embryonic conception of a inter-forces command; lack of a precise idea of the contribution that aviation was in a position to supply to the naval war and also to the terrestrial; nonexistence of disciplining norms for the Armed Forces collaboration in the tactical field; deficient radio connections, in practice reduced to the single telegraph and more by heavy technical limitations. In considering the facts, it does not seem exaggerated to assert that every Armed Forces entered the war by proper accounting with large basic problems. Though, we are just not the only ones having this *handicap*.

The theater of operations on which Italy played its cards, without having seized the decisive importance, was that of North Africa ⁽²⁴⁾. It is displayed subdivided into two sectors: western,

*General Giulio Douhet (30 May 1869 – 15 February 1930)

comprising Tripolitania and the French North African regions, and the eastern, comprising Cyrenaica and Egypt (sketch n. 1). For the prior, the goals for land operations, could be considered limited to the region of Tunisia, of which Algeria and Morocco represented a kind of logistic hinterland. The limitations imposed by the climate and the constricting ground still more reduced the field of operations, in fact, to the coastal strip, lock them between the *gebel* Tunisia and the sea. This zone, outside of which conduct only sporadic actions and of limited scale, clearly appeared to favor the French defense, beyond the balances of flank support (mountains and sea), have the advantage to oppose attackers on a more and more narrow front. The possibility of a surprise landing on the north-western coasts and northern Tunisia was then contrasted by the proximity of the fine sea and air base of Biserta, which, in conjunction with those of Corsica and the Provence coast, contributed to assure to France a good dominion of the western basin of the Mediterranean.

The eastern sector (sketch n. 2) was made up, on the enemy side, entirely by the territory of Egyptian, whose characteristic elements were the western desert, the frontier zone; the Delta region, the economic center of the country; the valley of the Nile, longitudinal collector of all resources and the mean communications and upper Egypt; the western desert, the vital artery that is the Suez canal and the hinterland of the Sinai peninsula. Also in this sector the climatic and environmental characteristics were strongly restrictive. In the western desert only three inhabited locations had economic value and military importance: Sollum, Siwa and Marsa Matruh. They were connected in various ways. Besides the truck usable coastal road Sollum-Alexandria, asphalted beginning at Sidi el Barrani and subsidized for good part of its length by the Marsa Matruh-Alexandria railway line, creating another important means of communication, parallel to the first, linking Siwa to Cairo. Subject to normal maintenance it concurred the transit of the motor vehicles in any season. The two road opens to truck traffic, the coastal and the inner, had numerous cross-sectional transverses, mainly between Sollum-Siwa, Sidi el Barrani-Siwa, Marsa Matruh-Siwa and Marsa Matruh-Qattara-Qara. The coastal strip to the height of the gulf of Arabia (area of el Alamein) is reduced until only 55 kilometers wide and one look at the depression of el Qattara with its impervious embankments. To the east of the depression and for a depth of about eighty kilometers, the truck useable tracks and the sections of paved road

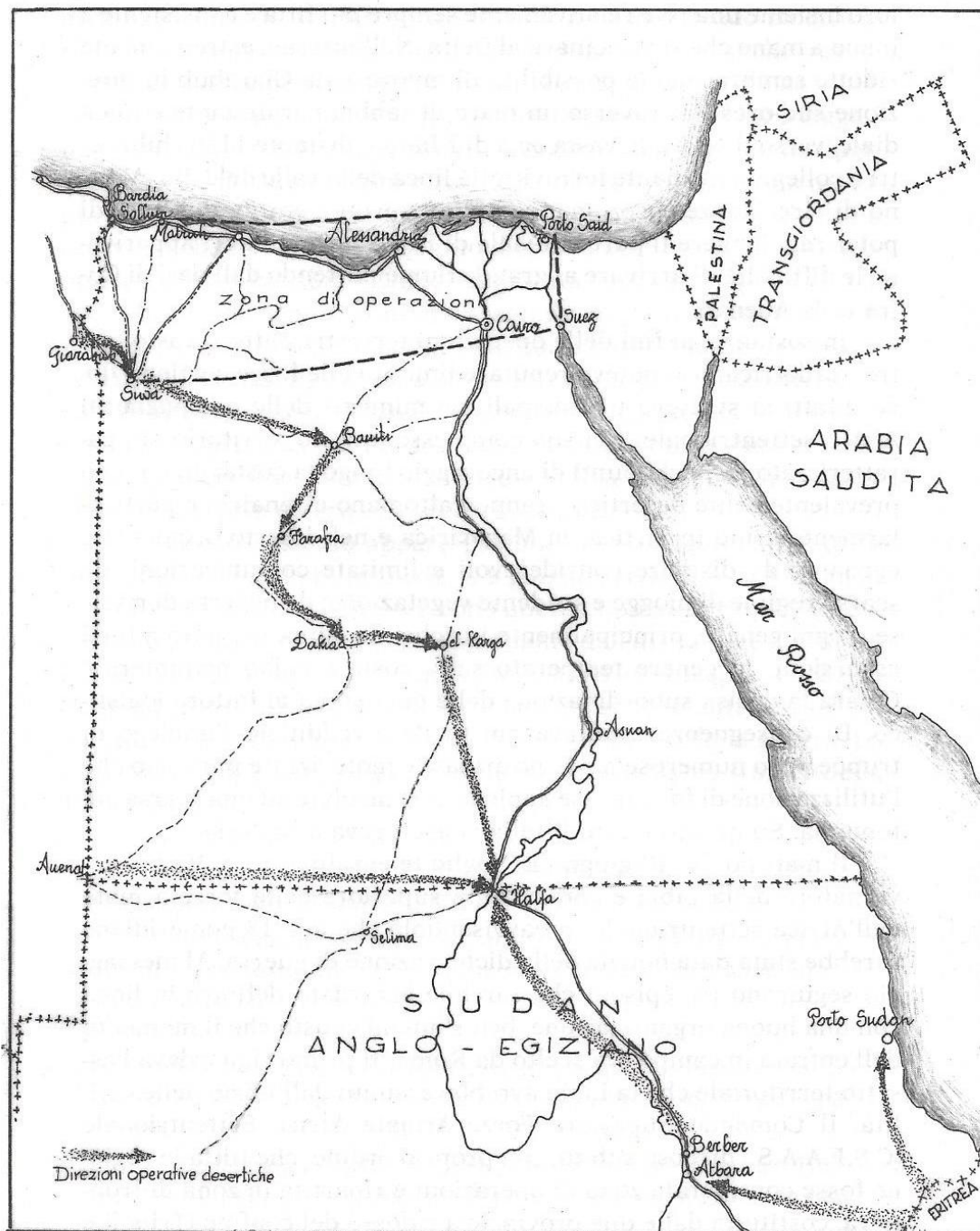
Schizzo n. 1

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The Libyan-Egyptian Theaters. of operations

Schizzo n. 2

LO SCACCHIERE LIBICO-EGIZIANO



paved roads becoming more frequent, yes to even constitute a network relatively more and more dense and firm as it approaches the Delta. In the interior, the possibilities to move from Giarabub in the south-west direction seemed extremely reduced, through a paralyzing and deadly sand ocean, towards the Nile and the immense oasis of Kharga, a distance of 1,150 kilometers and connected by means of a railroad following line of the Nile valley. At less than exceptionally favorable circumstances there was doubt of being able to reach the fluvial port of Haifa and no smaller difficulties appeared to arrive at the great river leaving the oasis of Cufra or Auenat.

In substance, the goals for the land operations, in all the immense North African theatre could be considered limited to the coastal strips, where in fact the main events of the campaigns in North Africa were carried out. In its composition, this territory was characterized by a few points of anchorage along the coast; by mostly desert land (except the Cyrenaica plateau) and particularly barren in Sirtica, in Marmarica and the western Egyptian desert; with considerable distances and limited communications; by insufficient regimen of rains and poor vegetation; by poverty of resources of every kind, mainly water; by a climate subject to strong temperature ranges, generally moderated on the coast and warmer in the interior. The clearly definite subordination of the operations to the logistic factor. Consequently it turned out easier and profitable to employ of less numerous troops but well armed and motorized rather than the use of a strong bound foot masses and one with insufficient autonomy. In this theatre Italy was about to battle.

The morning of 10 June Badoglio telegraphed the Mar. Balbo, Governor of Libya and Comando Superiore of the North Africa Armed Forces, forewarning him that afternoon at 18:00 hours it would be given the news of the war declaration. After the message their followed three episodes that would be hard to define in line with a good organization, the place the very moment of the entrance onto the field was chosen from Rome. The first regarded the regional planning that Libya would have assumed at the beginning of the hostilities. The Comando Superiore Armed Forces North Africa (C.S.F.A.A.S.) he quickly decided, with just reason, that the entire region was considered zone of operations and divide them into frontier zones, constituted by the two provinces against the border (Tripoli and Derna) and by the Libyan Sahara, and in the rear zones, represented by the two central provinces (Misurata and Benghazi). He was dealing with a

rather anomalous subdivision, now the expression *zone of sacrifice* constituted a new development without practical reflex, not being able to modify the administrative ordering of Libya. But was also a commendable initiative that was meant in some way to fill an omission of the government, which it was up to determine the appropriate territorial needs of particular military character, against the obvious legal repercussions, administrative and operating. As soon as a copy of the provision reached Rome, Soddu in fact hurried to propose that in analogy to arrange for the metropolitan territory, all of Libya was declared a war zone and that the areas called frontier zones assumed the denomination of operations area. This last, consequently, came under the jurisdiction of 5th Army stationed in the more northern part of the province of Tripoli (Capital excluded), for the 10th Army the entire province with Derna and the South Front Command for its strip of southern Saharan. The rear passed to the dependencies of the fortress of Tripoli and the base of Benghazi.

The second episode appears deeply meaningful for the forces of bureaucratic inertia. On 9 June the Command of the 10th Army received two dispatches, with which the Comando Superiore communicated that from the day of the 10th the commander of the army (Gen. Francisco Guidi) and the commander of the XXII Army Corps (Gen. Umberto Somma) relieved from their current assignment for reaching the age limits and to return to Italy at the disposition of the ministry of the war. The situation in Cyrenaica therefore was synthesized in the Historical Diary record of the 10th Army:

- "- the commander of the army was replaced by an General [Mario Berti], excellent, except that he never has been to North Africa;
- the commander of an army corps, arriving in the course of transformation, replaced by another general [Ennio Pitassi Mannella] still in Albania.
- Moreover:
- the commander of one of the divisions of this army corps, declared " *not fit*", has asked the immediate relief and repatriation;
- the commander of the *Marmarica* division (62nd) [Gen. Ruggero Tracchia] was to arrive in a few days, he has not still assumed the command and the vice-commander will have to return home;
- the commander of 1st Libyan division, excellent, old colonial, has been newly replaced with another general [Gen. Luigi Sibille],

excellent soldier, but he does not have any acquaintance with Libyan troops".

In order to add to the complete picture that not even the 5th Army turned out to be immune from changes *in extremis*: on 7 June Gen. Roberto Lerici was named commander of the *Bologna* (25th) Inf. Div. and Gen. Vincenzo Della Mura became person in charge of the functions of commander of the *Sirte* (61st) Inf. Div.

Cannot myself avoid a few benevolent comments on the comparisons of transfers at such level cannot be avoided, deciding and put into effect *with the imminence of a war*, much more than in the 30 May meeting Badoglio had confirmed to the Chiefs of General Staff the order of Mussolini to keep ready to receive in any day, beginning from the 5 June, the communication of the start of hostilities. And that certainly, considered the state of exceptional political tension, the movements in issue could and dutifully blocked or to be conveniently anticipated. In no way a crisis of command of that sort seems justified on the eve of opening fire. But they also hit, and perhaps mainly, other aspects of the events: that the relative orders to the commanders of the 10th Army and the XXI Corp had arrived at the Comando Superiore on the day of the 5th while the communications apparently reached the interested parties after four days, in the imminence of the change and that the situation had not provoked some objection on part of the Comando Superiore in the cares of the provision neither before nor after.

The third episode: as soon as receiving the warning, Balbo hurried to write to Badoglio that "(...) *In synthesis, of the materials promised from El Duce and that as you well know represent the indispensable minimum, e.g. not just the smallest part* (...)". The directory of the deficient materials was: 900 machineguns Fiat 35 out of 1800, 120 guns of 47/32, two antiaircraft groups and 20 sections of 20 millimeter, ammunitions facilities for the 900 machine-guns, 500,000 bombs for the 45 mm mortar and 125,000 for the 81 mm mortar, 230.000 rounds for the 47/32 guns, 11,700 for the 105/28 guns and 11,000 for the 149/12 guns, 8,000 bed rolls, materials for communications etc. In short, since the first gunshot sped up the completion of the equipments and supplies and it will be remembered that the ordinary flow of supplies was an curious point, as the Navy had clearly supported not being able to assure the traffic between the motherland and "the fourth shore".

On 10 June found in North Africa 236.000 men, of which 128,000 were in Tripolitania and 88,000 were in Cyrenaica ⁽²⁵⁾ with 1,477

guns of various types ⁽²⁶⁾. A disposition therefore gravitated towards the west, to defend the frontier with Tunisia, and articulated by two armies, with five army corps and fourteen divisions, of which nine were infantry, three were militia and two Libyan, besides the frontier guard and the Saharan troops. As the threat of the enemy armor has been emphasized, it deserves to be placed in evidence how much we possessed in this area: every division had one organic antitank company with eight pieces of 47/32 guns and (except for the Libyan divisions) a light tank battalion with 46 tank. In effects, only seven tank battalions existed and 60% of the 47/32 guns. But, to leave aside from the insufficiency of the light tank, and to ask them if they would not agreed to constitute a Armored Division with the tank battalions available -as was recommended in a secret study compiled by Soddu in 1939 upon request of Pariani -indeed they were subdivided between the divisions. This mass of men was fed by the Intendenza N.A., equipped from seven special warehouses (health and veterinary, provisions and oats, hay and straw, clothing and equipment, artillery, engineers and chemical materials), two field bakery sections, a motor pool, two truck battalions of maneuver, three trucks platoon, one ambulance section, two post offices and a mobile territorial regiment. The equipments and the supplies had, altogether, to stretch for an self-sufficiency of twelve months, but they reached three months for pasta-rice, four months for meat-fish tins, six months for the hay and varied from a minimum of a month to a maximum of approximately three months for the other kinds.

The Air Force Commander of Libya (Gen. F. Porro), that from 15 July would assume the title of Commander 5th Air Fleet, had a total of four Bombing wings (Stormi) with 125 serviceable aircraft, one fighter wing and one fighter group with 88 aircraft, one ground attack wing with 34 aircraft and one sixty of reconnaissance and Saharan aircraft ⁽²⁷⁾. It is opportune to shortly dwell on the subject. In the cited meeting of 30 May, Badoglio had addressed to the Gen. Pricolo for *"to hold ready a share of the aviation located [in Italy] that it can, on my judgment, to transfer them to Libya for giving aid"* against incursions of medium armor, since the deficiency of antitank armament did not concur with major land units to do well. On the one hand, since the ground, types in Marmarica, were absolutely uncovered, the aircraft was found in the best ones, under the conditions in order to suppress any point. For accuracy, Badoglio said: *"an Air Force that you must keep them dispersed"* and added:

and added: "*It is the only way that we have to refrain an action of the sort*", Nobody inquired, those most directly interested, that is to say Gen. Pricolo. Nevertheless calmly entrusting to the air force the task of stopping offensives conducted with armored vehicles which was not a tactical solution that could be pleasing. And more the aircraft in use could not be thought as ideal under some aspects. The SM.81 bombers were well known as outdated with a maximum speed (330 km/h) and range (1800 km); therefore was underway their substitution with the SM. 79 (maximum speed 425 km/h, range 2500 km), the aircraft that having also received excellent testing in the Spanish civil war from their derivation from a civil airplane and except, however, did not resist comparison with foreign types in service; such as the *Bristol Blenheim* and the *Vickers Wellington*. For the fighters the C.R. 32, whose maximum speed was inferior to that of the most unexceptional enemy bombers, and the C.R. 42 existed in Libya, excellent ease of handling but with a maximum speed of 420 km/h, which could compete favorably with the *Gloster Gladiator* (which was better armed), but not with the *Hurricane*, that reached 530 km/h, the *Spitfire* and *Messerschmitt Bf. 109*, that reached 570 km/h. The 50th Ground Attack wing, then, had Ba.65, aircraft that had been given to a series of the most serious incidents were considered with the most absolute distrust, especially those with the A.80 motor. Therefore had been decided to substitute the Ca. 310, while waiting for the future Ba. 88, if not that in the climate and the sands of Africa the Ca. 310 revealed many disadvantages that induce their passage to the aerial observation squadrons and returning, for ground attack, to the Ba.65 with K.14 motor.

The Naval Commander of Libya (Adm. Brivonesi) did not have the light ships for defending the coast: the cruiser *San Giorgio* utilized as a floating battery, four torpedo boats, six gunboats and several submarines.

Such were the forces with which begun in North Africa what Mussolini called "the parallel war".

2. THE TUNISIAN FRONT

A lot has been written on the insufficient French consistency and the reflection taken from it by our intelligence, based also on the testimony of the Gen. Bertrand, Head of Cabinet from Gen. Charles Auguste Nogues, Commander in Chief of the nordafricano theater of operations

made the center of the parliamentary inquiry after the war: *"Except three or four divisions remained on the Tripolitania front and a division located near Tunis (...) that was all that was available, inclusive of a single efficient tank battalion in all the French North Africa, had departed for the Metropolis"* ⁽²⁸⁾. It is therefore worth the pain to dwell on the deployment (sketch n. 3).

At the Italian Libyan-French Tunisian and border they were both on the defensive. According to the information supplied by the S.I.M*, the enemy had at the frontier a thin alignment of light units, *goums* and irregular bands, that extended until the Sahara. Back to, in the zone of Ben Gardane-Medenine, that is to say in the narrow corridor running parallel to the coast determined by the Ksour mountains, modest but of most insufficient which can be followed, two divisions of infantry, 64th and the 65th, and one of cavalry. Towards Gabes the 85th Inf. Div. with a tank battalion. More than a hundred kilometers to the north finds the line of *chotts*, a excellent defensive position, in correspondence of which it was thought was three divisions -the 65th Inf. Div. near Sfax, the 6th Inf. Div. and the 84th Inf. Div. in the area of Gafsa -and part of a fourth, the 54th Inf. Div., pre-positioned for the coastal defense of Tunis at Gabes and dispersed therefore over 400 kilometers. Additionally to rear the other five Divisions: the 74th Inf. Div., with two tank battalions, at Tunis, and four, two of which were course of forming, the area of Bone-Costantina. Ultimately: in Tunisia was characterized eight divisions of infantry and one of cavalry; in Algeria three divisions of infantry of which one in process of constitution and one of cavalry under constitution. In Morocco was marked three others divisions of infantry. In spite of the worries expressed from many Italian chiefs, the picture, on the face of it, seems to indicative the intentions anything other than aggressiveness. More probable a line of enemy behavior, founded on an action of delay and attrition beginning at the frontier, continuing to a surely strong forward defense position corresponding to Mareth (approximately 200 kilometers from Ras Agadir, point of border on the sea) and then of the *chotts* the blocking the direction of Medenine-Gabes-Sfax.

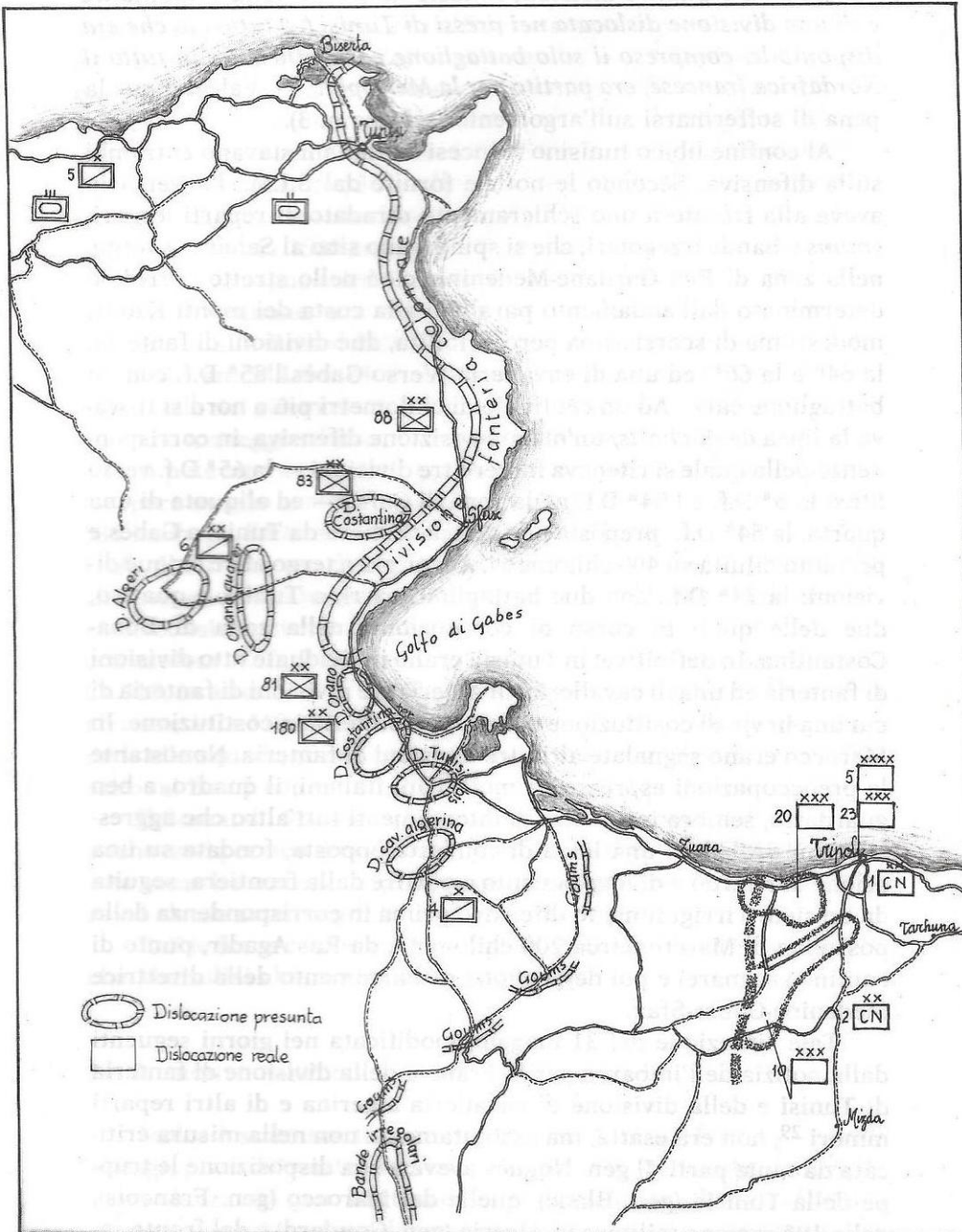
Such was the situation on 31 May, modified in the days following by the news of the embarking for France of a division of Tunisian infantry and of a division of Algerian cavalry and other minor units ⁽²⁹⁾, it was not exact, but absolutely not in the amount critique from many parts. Gen. Nogues had at his disposition the troops of Tunisia (Gen. Blanc), those of Morocco (Gen. Francois), of the 19th military region in Algeria (Gen. Goudard) and of the Eastern Saharan, front as well as Major units and

*Italian Army Intelligence Service

Location of the forces on the Libyan-Tunisian theater

Schizzo n. 3

SCACCHIERE LIBICO TUNISINO
SITUAZIONE AL 10 GIUGNO 1940



of the Eastern Saharan from, as well as major units and the several formations in general reserve. Also the other Armed Forces were placed under his command: Adm. Esteva, Commander in Chief of the fleet, and the Gen. Penes, commander of the 5th air fleet. The larger of the forces was concentrated in Tunisia and articulated on two fronts⁽³⁰⁾. The South-Tunisian front (Gen. Poupinel) spread about as a cover was entrusted to the 4th brigade of cavalry (Gen. Burnol) reinforced by two battalions, the reconnaissance groups of the 81st and the 80th divisions and from a unit of *goums*; on a natural defensive position of the heights of Mareth from the *region fortifiée* (it is worth to note a fortress division or stopping); finally, a reserve composed of the 81st Inf. Div. (Gen. Chevalier) and by the 180th Inf. Div. (Gen. Rochas) in the area of Gabes and by several units, among which a battalion of tanks, to shelter the defensive position. Ending here, therefore, the reconstruction of the S.I.M. was essentially agreed with.

The north-Tunisian front comprised the 88th Inf. Div. for the defense of the coast from Biserta to Sfax (that had been reported as the 54th Inf. Div.), the 83rd Inf. Div. (Gen. Verges) for the control of the territory (*maintien de l'ordre*) at Sfax with the equivalent of a tank battalion; finally the theater of operations reserve formed from the 6th Light Cavalry Division (Gen. Clouet des Perruches) at Gafsa and by a armored tactical group of battalion strength to the west of Tunis. Also with regard to this the S.I.M. had just seen.

Is but to note the absolute lack of report on divisional makeup⁽³¹⁾, but above all to put in evidence that in the Italian reconstruction the major enemy units were given to a good level of efficiency, while were valid sensitive deficiencies of various enfeebling kind of the French troops. In neighboring Algeria there was found the 5th Cavalry Brigade and the North Group (equal to one Italian binary division) to the south of Bona, the 183rd Inf. Div. at Costantina 181st Inf. Div. at Algeri, 182nd Inf. Div. at Orano⁽³²⁾ and the CIMO battle group, equivalent to one binary division, at Tlemcen (south-west of Oran), besides numerous non-divisional units. In Morocco there was the 3rd Moroccan Div. and the equivalent of at least two divisions of infantry, without evidently the natural solidarity. Pulling the sums, on June 10th French North Africa had eight divisions of infantry, one of fortress, one of light of cavalry, two brigades of cavalry, two tactical groups the strength of the Italian binary division and very many other units, some of which were excellent, like the regiments of the foreign Legion and the *goums*.

As far as the total force of the African army, needs

to explode the legend that they had been progressively anemic until becoming almost an empty shell. In August 1939 the effectives numbered 200,000 men: 83,000 for the 19th Algeria Corp, 38,000 for the independent Tunisia division and 79,000 for the troops (regular and supplementary) of Morocco. The 1st of June 1940, according the situations dispatches of Algeria, the theater of operations counted 410,000 men, of which 189,000 for the defense of the territory, and precisely: 134,000 in Algeria, 139,000 in Tunisia and 137,000 in Morocco. The 25th of June the total of the present exceeded 410,000 men⁽³³⁾, without counting the 10,000 men transferred to Africa in the last days and those flowing in to the 8th of July. In other words, for how much from 1st September 1939 to the 25th of June 1940 having departed from North Africa 169,837 men -20,315 of which for the Middle East, the coast of the Somalis and Indo-china -they reached average level after the mobilization quantitatively remained almost unchanged⁽³⁴⁾ for the arrival of units coming from France or western Africa, the balance cadets and squads of the same arriving from the motherland and local recruitments, that they would have had a greater yield if the equipment and armament availabilities had concurred.

Of the effective presents in all of Africa in the north on June 10th considerations of the situation⁽³⁵⁾ and distance could be considered to make untouchable the units of Morocco and three quarters of those from Algeria, therefore, according to the appraisal of the S.I.M., the enemy were theoretically in a position to employing in Tunisia one dozen divisions maximum. Now, inasmuch as in effects they had three divisions between Ben Gardane and Gabes, three others between Sfax and Tunisi, one at Costantina and a solid battle group to south of Bona, moreover the very numerous non-divisional detachments and the brigade of cavalry could be assimilated to two divisions: the accounts, therefore, would return. But if the critique turned to the numerical reconstruction of the apparent forces, as it has been shown, baseless, about the other even if it is legitimate to dissent from the appraisals of the time. First of all it is extremely debatable to assimilate the entire support to the major units: a division is such when it is formed, trained and employed under an organic command is unlike a unitary whole. The supports come assigned adapted in order, to reinforce the division, not replace it with equal efficiency. Secondly the same denomination of some major unit (*regionfortiffee, de maintien de the ordre, de protection*) and location (a coastal alignment or the very rearward) or organic situation (units in reconstitution or formation) denotes certain connections in the comparisons to field employment, that is to say dynamic

**SITUATION OF THE MAJOR FRENCH UNITS
MOBILIZED IN NORTH AFRICA
AT THE SIGNING OF THE ARMISTICE**

Major unit	Location	Notes
1st Moroccan Div.	France	Departed in October 1939 broken up 10 September 1939. Its units among them two big tanks, remained in Morocco as territorial troops
2nd Moroccan Div.	Morocco	
3rd Moroccan Div.	Morocco	
81st Inf. Div.	Tunisia	Departed in September 1939 one regiment, the 344th, Departed for France in June 1940
82nd Inf. Div	France	
83rd Inf. Div	Tunisia	
84th Inf. Div	France	Departed amid the end of May and first of June 1940
85th Inf. Div	France	
86th Inf. Div	Syria	
87th Inf. Div	France	Departed between the end of May and first of June 1940
88th. Inf. Div	Tunisia	
180th. Inf. Div	Tunisia	
181st. Inf. Div	Algeria	Departed in September 1939
182nd. Inf. Div	Algeria	
183rd Inf. Div	Algeria	
Regional Fortresses	Tunisia	Departed in October 1939
6th Lt. Cav. Div.	Tunisia	
2nd Cav. Bde.	France	Formed in 1940 by combining the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Brigades
4th Cav. Bde.	Tunisia	
5th Cav. Bde	Algeria	
Nord Reg.	Algeria	Formed in 1940
CIMO Reg.	Algeria	

Note: the make up of an infantry divisions was trinary, with a cavalry group for reconnaissance and a regiment of artillery with two-three Battalions.

In short, also assuming the worse case, it was very difficultly to expect an offensive lead by more than three-four division, of infantry for what's more, even if supported by tank units. In fact the 8th of June Balbo determined the movement of the 2nd Libyan division (Gen. Pescatori) from Tripoli to Benghazi and a few short days latter not more was spoken of dangers to the West, without some fresh facts having modified the situation in Tunisia.

However what was the French plan of operation? At the beginning of the thirties France had decided to protect against an eventual Italian attack using the isthmus existing between the sea and the *chotts* in the immediate vicinity of Gabes, on the alignment of the Akarit *Wadi*. The first works were completed from 1935, but in the successive years they took on a vast development, and was prepared, one hundred fifty kilometers more to the south, the so-called *Mareth line*, between the coast and the mounts Matmata or Ksoilr. The position, than in 1939 could be said complete, comprised two alignments of strongholds many alternated between them: 28 on that front line, the main, and 18 on the rear, to approximately 1500 meters from the previous. Every strongholds it was formed by emplacements of various types and concrete shelters in proof of small-caliber; those of second line had essentially a field character. As, an obstacle a continuous middle ditch and barbed wire and the possibility to elevate, all the necessities, the waters of the Zigzaou Wadi, whose sides had been cut vertically.

More to support, the cited Akarit *Wadi* line could serve as a position of control: height up to 12 meters, Akarit reduced to only 11 kilometers the front of attack between the gulf of Gabes and the eastern extreme of the *hott edl-Djerid*. After all, a modest fortification complex but thought serious for the Italian enemy, equipped only with many light tanks and a few 149 mm pieces. But with completion of the system emerged the possibility to use them like a base for a counter-offensive, using in particular the rugged ridge of mount Matmata: a attacker who was himself disposed to exceed the Mareth line frontally would have offered the left flank to attack departing from the mountain position. Gen. Nogues, in 1939, constituted a *ad hoc* battle group of some thousand of men and he was preoccupied to extend the position towards the west, so as to avoid encircling, however at the beginning of the war only stronghold of Bir Sultan had been prepared. Of other side Nalut and el-Assa, the Italian most advances points, distance approximately 250 kilometers in desert land, nearly deprived of water, and,

in the judicious opinion of the French leaders, the Italian 5th Army was not absolutely in grade neither to put into effect the forcing of the defensive position nor, less still, avoiding them through the inner desert area for lack of suitable equipment. Nogues had prepared also an offensive plan on Tripoli, with one effort practiced along two directions: coastal, fed from an advanced base pre-positioned at Ben Gardane, and the inner one, fed from Tatahouine.

The two locations, situated eighty kilometers ahead of the Mareth line, had been conveniently prepared with functional anti-tank and with a system of communications support that would have allowed the easy supply of the bases. All adding is however reasonable to nourish some doubt on the concrete possibilities that the offensive had to reach Tripoli, above all in June 1940 when aerial support was reduced to nothing. To the end of May four existing ordinary bombing groups had departed for France, therefore between the 1st and the 15th of June remained some hundreds of so called transition aircraft, of which the serviceable ones were in practical use essentially for training duty. For combat 40-45 fighter aircraft seemed available, 6 bombers and five or six squadrons of *Potez* for observation.

It is necessary to speak also about the materials, at least about the main ones. In the spring of 1940 the French had ⁽³⁶⁾: in Morocco the 62nd and the 66th tank battalions with 90 R-35 and H-35 tanks of 12 tons; in Algeria the 64th battalion with 50 H-35 tanks; in Tunisia the 61st and 67th battalions with 150 D.I tanks of 16 tons. At the beginning of June the 67th battalion (45 tank) was embarked for France and was replaced by a new unit with 48 old F. T. of 6 tons. which arrived from the homeland. Therefore they were dealing with, altogether, of 240 modern tanks, to which they were adding 244 F.T. tanks, comprised the 48 cited ⁽³⁷⁾, and 174 armored car and 50 small tracked vehicles. A lot of the armament material was hidden from the Italian control commission. The artilleries *assessed* numbered more than 1,400 up to 47 Caliber, 536 field guns, 717 for coastal defense, 173 anti-air. In the automotive field 9,000 trucks, 600 towing, 500 tractors and 4,000 cars were counted. According to the Gen. Nogues the missing material was "*lost in action*" it represented more than a third of the authorized equipments and was qualitatively much better that that allowed. The know data is therefore uncertain. Confining ourselves to some say, I compare is eloquent:

Material	According to Nogues	According to Weygand	According to Peyrouton ⁽³⁸⁾
Rifles	20,000	55,000	200,000
Light Machine Guns.	4,000		600
Machine Guns			400
75 mm Guns	30	82	80
47 mm Guns		43	50
Tank & Armored Cars	30	25	50
Trucks	500	6,000	
Rifle Cartridges	21 million	26 million	
75 mm Rounds	170,000	205,000	

In any case, wanting to give an indication on the real operating possibilities of the French troops to act by the armistice, it seems to be able to assert that the shortage of materials of armament, munitions, clothing and equipment was effective, especially in Algeria and Morocco, but not, according to the same dramatic admissions from Nogues. In a general manner the supplies were valued to three months of self sufficiency, while the deficiencies turned out most serious in the field of the communications and felt in some areas of the clothing.

From the Italian side the proximity of Tripoli to the frontier and the importance of the two operating lines, the coastal and the *gebolica*, had determined the general system of defense organization. The forts -in truth large strongpoint -of Zuara, on the sea, and of Nalut had the task to halt the enemy advances along two directions or, if it were penetrated in the interposing Gefara, obligate him on the spot facilitating the favorable outcome, against us, a decisive encounter in the Gefara. At half distance between Zuara and Tripoli the "line of support", created immediately to the west of the Sonnan-Bir el Gnem-Jefren roadway, a very modest field alignment in the meridian sense, had the function of protection of the assembled mass maneuver and to supply support to the intervention of this. More to support there was the entrenched field of Tripoli, a system with the positions of Garian, functioned as last bulwark and of direct defense for the base of Tripoli as well as control of the

Eastern Tripolitania, The work, started in January 1938 with a first appropriation of about 50 million, had received greater impetus in 1939 -40 with the ulterior total appropriations of 420 million and with the consignment of thirty labor companies (7,500 men approximately), but on 10 June they were still very far from completion, also because recently had been studied refining the system. The single program of 1938 foresaw for Tripoli 40 posts ⁽³⁹⁾; 160 protected ambushes ⁽⁴⁰⁾, of which 100 were for machine-guns, 54 for 47/32 antitank guns and 6 mixed for machine-guns and guns; Gun emplacements for 40 batteries of the frontier guard, For Zuara and Nalut the works were naturally much inferior, In the first were concerning 8 posts; 113 protect observation posts, of which were 83 for machineguns, 24 for 47/32 antitank guns and 6 combined; gun emplacements for 12 batteries of the frontier guard, For Nalut was dealing with 7 posts; 41 protect observation posts, of which 28 for machineguns, 10 for 47/32 guns and 3 mixed; gun emplacements for 6 batteries, On the 1st of June they had been completed the masonry jobs of the work (the 55 posts and 316 observation posts) but relative deficiencies to the inner systems and in particular to munitions reserves they were found (13 ready of 63), As far as the armament of the frontier guard the 395 machine-guns existed of 544; 438 Light machineguns against 170 being necessary and the excess was used provisionally in substitution of the lacking machine-guns; 18 of the 47/32 guns of the 140 but the momentarily deficiency was attenuated using 40 of the 77/28 guns; 55 batteries ⁽⁴¹⁾ of the 58 but with deficiencies in the loading materials; 12 of the 27 casements. The roadblocks were practically on point, 21 of the 23, however for the anti-tank obstacles were much in delay: approximately two kilometers completed and twelve in course against the 47 foreseen, No mine fields, To such a complex of positions were required approximately 7,000 men of the frontier guard.

On 10 May Balbo, arrived in Rome, he was received by an euphoric Mussolini with the message, received from von Mackensen, with which Hitler was bringing him up to date on the beginning of the offensive on the western front, taken by the yearning to take part, he thought that *"he must seize the times"* as Ciano in his diary wrote, and announced to Balbo that by now the period of non-belligerence was ending, Returning to Tripoli, these dispatches sent to Soddu the listing of materials thought indispensable, but he wanted Mussolini not only knowing the state of fact, but to "attend to" the consignments:

"(...) Gen. Soddu has asked me have make him at once a listing of materials that I think necessary in the most absolute way: and I dispatch a copy of the current letter, in which is the precise list to You, because you are to be informed, what is necessary to Libya in order to support, with probability of containing, the enemy attacks on two fronts.

In the recent memorandum of the Chief of the G.S. General said that, with the increase of 80 thousand men, the proportion between the troops under my orders and the enemies, it will be one to two, but the thing has little importance: it is not the number of the enemies who concern me, but our armaments. Today the superb legions of Cesar would succumb before to one section of machine-guns. Allow me to say therefore that with major unit formations limited and oldest artilleries, lacking or nearly so in tank destroyer and anti-aircraft arms, I have absolute need of being able to count on the defenses of the two ways to access Tripolitania, on the citadels of Tripoli and those of Tobruk and Bardia.

To have of the fortified works and leave undefended of weapons is an absurdity. My demand first of all concerns therefore on the necessity to put in efficiency these fortifications, that represent the first modest plan still not completed.

Other necessity to which is needs adequate supply and very soon is represented by the air defense. The means we have are absolutely insufficient for number and quality.

Plans do not lack, but there are not the batteries and the relative organizations (networks of sighting, communications, etc).

The objectives to defend are few, but exactly for this their importance is large.

As much I ask represents, therefore, the indispensable minimum for giving a *sure* efficiency to the defense of the more sensitive points of our military organization(...). Duce, afford me finally wanting to beg you to supervise because the program that You yourself have laid out and that it is not possible for reductions, it's integrally applied in order to put Libya in a position of acquitting its function in the great picture of the new European war"⁽⁴²⁾.

At the point in which things were, if the letter of Balbo reached to move forth the war it had to be set up different and to take the heart of the issue, if instead -more probably -he was aiming at simply to remind them of the promises and to press the realization it was being more opportune to calibrate the necessities. Balbo knew well the limitations under which Italy suffered and, consequently, could not think to embody in a few weeks the program still not completed. The retort of Soddu, which in his turn hurried to embroil Mussolini in the responsibility of Libyan preparation, under

some aspects were central: *"the demands from the Comando Superiore North Africa Armed Forces seem preceding from the general situation and only hold account of that one of Libya if, but behind others much less: "It is from considering that these unexpected drives to act in favor of various battlefields (A.O.I*, Aegean, Libya), as if they were theaters of operations to being themselves (...) which can completely harmful to interfere with (..)"* ⁽⁴³⁾. That each one of the territories overseas had their own problems was certain, therefore as a fact that the *"unexpected pushes"* were a direct consequence of the impulses of Mussolini. Salivate his anxieties that Libya, at blame or in argument, was aroused in all, that Badoglio composed. In fact on 21 May Balbo flew to Rome for the third time in a month. Was being called together by Badoglio, but in the three days of residence in the Capital he conferred again with Mussolini, Graziani and Soddu. It was in that occasion that he demanded and obtained the *Centauro* (131st) Arm. Div., located in Albania. Against a division that was still equipped entirely of light tanks, would have constituted a large gift, but the movement was cancelled nearly right away because of the unavailability of time and ships. Probably it was a matter of deficit of will. Balbo then demanded formally to Badoglio in effect a new inspection of Libya, but it was being 6 June and the proposal was dropped.

The 5th Army (Gen. Italo Gariboldi) held positions behind the three sectors held by the frontier guard. To the north, blocking the Medenine-Zuara- Tripoli direction, was the XX Army Corps (Gen. Ferdinando Cona) with the infantry divisions *Pavia* (17th) (Gen. Pietro Zaglio) in first formation and *Brescia* (27th) (Gen. Giuseppe Cremascoli) and *Sirte* (61st) (Gen. Vincenzo Della Mura) in second formation, between Ez Zauia and Giordani. More to the south, guiding the obstruction of Nalut-Giado-Bir el Gnem-el Azizia- Tripoli and Nalut-Giado-Jefren-Garian, was deployed the X Army Corps (Gen. Alberto Barbieri) with the divisions *Bologna* (25th) (Gen. Roberto Lerici) and *Sabratha* (60th) (Gen. Guido Della Bona) in the first formation and the *Savona* (55th) (Gen. Pietro Maggiani) and the 2nd CC.NN. Division (Leut. Gen. Francisco Argentino), part of the XXIII Corp, in the second. Tripoli was entrusted to units of the XXIII Corp (Gen. Annibale Bergonzoli) with the 1st CC.NN. Div. (Brig. Gen. Francisco Antonelli) covering the area of Tagiura.

The Saharan sector was covered those principle sectors, whose alignment had to give assurance. It was being a matter of a territory mostly desert and inhospitable, in which since they could find, some developed movements interfering with operations therefore action tended to be more to the north or to speed up emotionally the Arabic world. The

* Italian East Africa

France seemed to be able to employ the sole existing forces in the region to the west and to south of the Libyan Sahara, it is worth to say a force of six companies and a battery of the Algerian Sahara, the III Senegalese *tirailleurs* battalion of Niger and the Senegalese *tirailleurs* regiment of Chad for total of approximately, 9000 men. After encircling the Italian agent troops on the Nefusa *gebel*, that were need to protect the left flank of the 5th Army. But there was also to attempt a surprise attack on the oases of Cufra and Auenat, where among other things existed air force bases for the connection with the A.O.I.. (Italian East Africa) In fact the French themselves from September 1939 had a plan pointed approximately the occupation of Cufra by means of the employment of one motorized column departing from Faya (traveling a thousand kilometers distance) constituted from a combat group of battalion level and from a logistic group, for total 1,000 men, 190 motor vehicles, provisions and water for ten days, fuel for 1,000 kilometers. The south front Commander (Gen. Sebastiano Gallina) had a Libyan battle group (of two battalions, one position machine-gun company, one camel-borne battery of 65/17 and two 20 millimeter automatic-guns sections) and of the Libyan Sahara Troops (a Saharan battalion, one company scout cars, four *meharisti* companies and ten position machine-gun companies).

The Air Forces located in Tripolitania depended on the West Command Area and were represented by:

- 15th Bombing Wing with SM-79 and SM-81 at Castel Benito;
- 33rd Bombing Wing with SM- 79 at Bir el Bhera
- 50th Ground Attack Wing (less one squadron) with Ca-310 and Ba-65 at Sorman;
- 13th Fighter Group with CR-42 and CR-32 at Castel Benito
- 64th Aerial Observation Group with *Ghibli* at Mellaha;
- 1st A.P C. Group with *Ghibli* at Mellaha;
- 99th Saharan Squadron with *Ghibli* at Hon.

In total the efficient aircrafts amounted to 74 bombers, 28 ground attack aircraft, 36 fighters, 8 reconnaissance and 18 *Ghibli*. To this add one squadron of transport with SM- 75 and one of rescue with Cant.Z. 506. There was also a native parachutist battalion, soon joined by a second national battalion, at Castel Benito, but, also having reached a good technical level, some specific employment was neglected.

3. THE EGYPTIAN FRONT

To the east the initial situation was still richer with doubts and fears (sketch n. 4). According to the S.I.M., along the Egyptian frontier from Sollum to the oasis of Siwa found approximately 20,000 men Egyptians troops for the most part: several frontier brigades, *The Camel Corps*, *The Arab Corps* and various units. Behind a band bordering on, in the immense triangular area Sollum-Sidi el Barrani-Bir Scegga (about eighty kilometers to the south of Sollum), bordered by the sea, was located one British armored division with 114 heavy tanks⁽⁴⁴⁾, 134 light tanks and 38 armored car. Behind it, always along the coast as was indicate by the presence a large enemy, diluted along a band two hundred kilometers from el- Maktla to ed-Daba: one Indian division, one New Zealand division with reduced strength, one Egyptian armored division, for total of 28-29,000 men. Then, behind a wide empty desert, in the triangle Alexandria- el Mansur-Cairo, held by one British division and one Egyptian brigade: over 30,000 men. To east, between Porto Said and Suez, the garrison of the canal was comprised of two British battalions and various units for 2-3,000 men. The southern front was entrusted to one Egyptian brigade (10,000 men) at the desert oases and the garrison of the Red Sea (5-6,000 men, India) at the height of the Gulf of Suez. In all the forces present in Egypt at the beginning of June 1940 they were estimated around the 100-105,000 men: 40,000 British, 15,000 Indians, 7,000 New Zealanders, 1,500 Rhodesians and 40,000 Egyptians.

The Italian appreciation of the possible adversary was based mostly on a series of considerations. The alternatives evidently were two: an offensive, particularly if fed by reinforcements coming from Palestine, where it had the 6th Australian Inf. Div. and the 1st English cavalry Div. (approximately 28,000 men), if possible in conjunction with a similar French movement from Tunisia, or the defensive. In the first case it was believed that an attack could not win quickly because of the environmental characteristics. Before reaching the first objective of some importance, Tobruk, the enemy would have had to cross nearly 150 kilometers of semi desert and absolutely lacking in water resources, the area the zone through Bardia, proceeding with the mass of the forces along the coastal route and with a much smaller portion along the inner route, from Siwa for Giarabub. However this tended to favor excellent trained personnel with motor vehicles of extensive suitability to maneuver

[illegible]

to maneuver cross-country at remarkable speed, the perfect organization of ground in liaison and with the aviation, the availability of armored car and tanks particularly in the desert war actions, the intrinsic superiority of the tanks weaponry, speed and maneuverability and the efficiency of modern artillery, motorized and greater caliber and range. To these positive the Italian added these negatives factors: the insufficient training of the officers and men, the limited availability of motor vehicles to the point to impose choice between unit transport or supply, the multiple types of motor vehicles for most inability to move off road, the light tanks of 3 tons with more deficiencies than we need say, the old artilleries, the embryonic tank defense and the nonexistent anti-aircraft or nearly so. In short, a British attack had many prospects to cause serious trouble. We see at the time the balance seems painted with greater pessimism than necessary, however to the Italians in the field it seen therefore and it generated at once shyness if not just dishearten. If then the adversary had opted for the defensive, waiting for better times, knowing that he could count on a zone of safety with field works of insufficient importance, widely alternated along the strip of border until the oasis of Siwa; a position of resistance between the entrenched field of Marsa Matruh and the depression of el-Qattara, also very broken, with emplacements and fire direction centers several good roadsteads; a rear position to directed protection of the Nile delta from Alexandria to el-Fayum, with field works; a kind of band of assurance against attacks from the Sudan, represented from the oases of Bahariya, Farafra, Mut and el-Kharga and from the center of Manqabad on the Nile.

It must be said also for the adversary it was not all roses. Gen. Archibald Wavell, Commander in Chief of the Middle East, had at his disposal of 36,000 men in Egypt and 28,000 in Palestine. More precisely, in Egypt was found 7th Arm Div., the 4th Indian Inf. Div. and one New Zealand Inf. Div., more than to 14 battalions of infantry. As it is easy to see in the chart on the following page, the information of the S.I.M. was inaccurate, also in error on the organization of the 6th Inf. Div. ⁽⁴⁵⁾. The greater part of the non-divisional units. The accounts did not list the entity of the forces, in relation to the organizational tables and the information, amounted to approximately 63,000 men declared against the 36,000 Wavell had but it neglected the logistic services, or the 50,000 indicated from other authoritative sources ⁽⁴⁶⁾. Another point of inaccuracy regarded the Egyptian army. For if it was to be a potential enemy who, in isolation appeared non-frightening, in union with a solid operating instrument it was to give to a certain degree an appreciable contribution.

Its contribution was limited to one frontier brigade of two battalions, three brigades of infantry of three battalions and one armored division of a regiment light tanks, a regiment armored car and a regiment of light artillery, besides various supports units. In effects the data was corresponding, to what was said by Wavell, the units Egyptians were, in many aspects, much better equipped than those of the British. Egypt had not declared war on the Axis, therefore its forces were left for inner tasks. And he had to consider also Palestine. According to the S.I.M. there was found in that region the 6th Australian Inf. Div. and 1st British Cav. Div. In effects there was something more: the 16th infantry brigade, a regiment of cavalry (the Greys), two unattached battalions and smaller units, but, being two incomplete divisions, the total force did not reach 30,000 men. While possible from the Italian side was consider an express transfer of these troops to Egypt, from English side it was estimated that they could not be equipped and trained conveniently before the first of the year. Moreover the employment of the brigade of infantry in Iraq was foreseen.

The first worry of Wavell and the British war cabinet regarding the influx of supply and of reinforces. The way of the Mediterranean had become much too dangerous and the long route by the Cape of Good Hope just in the terminal phase, in the Red Sea, passed under the control of the Italian navy and aviation. Then however did not exist other alternative necessary to entrusted them essentially to the circumnavigation of Africa. How in the employment of the forces, evidently no advantage could be obtained from the average superiority in battleships if before was realized a hardly adapted logistic organization. Since 1939 were in actual phase of performance planning that as given of base it previewed six divisions in Egypt and three in Palestine, assuming for every division the average value of 25,000 men, comprehensive of a proportional share of elements of support of forward units^{(49)*}. The quadrilateral el Mansura - Ismailia -Suez -Cairo became the great logistic area for the feeding of the effort that in all probability would have been necessary to support in the Egyptian western desert, in which the most important point of reference was Marsa Matruh, to 320 kilometers from Alexandria and 250 from Sollum. In order to reach that advanced base three ways existed: the railroad and a single track constructed from the time of the Italian-Ethiopian war, a coastal road of good ability and the sea.

* there is no foot note #48 in the original text, #47 & 49 are out of order,
48 H.F. JOSLEN, *Orders of Battle of the Second World War 1939-1945*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1960. To keep in mind that the British Brigade corresponded roughly to the Italian Regiment and the regiment to Italian Tank battalion.

The cavalry regiments and armored personnel carriers were usually ordered with a regimental command and three squadrons, each with a command platoon (two cruisers and two close supports) and four platoons (three tanks each). The regimental command had four light tanks or *cruisers* and 20 scout cars (armored cars). The Hussars had a staff or different, as Divisional reconnaissance unit: a regimental command (three armored cars) and three squadrons with a platoon command and five platoons exploring. Altogether had 57 armored cars armed with Bren submachine gun and Boys anti-tank rifle.

The artillery regiments were ordered with two or more batteries, equivalent to the Italian group, each about 12 pieces with mechanical tow.

THE BRITISH FORCES IN EGYPT IN JUNE 1940

according to the S.I.M.	in truth ⁽⁴⁷⁾
<p>7th Arm. Div with: one Bde. light Tanks of the 7th. 8th and 11th Hussars; one Bde. heavy tanks with two Bns.; a support group with two Mot. Bns; 3rd Horse Art Regt.; a antitank Regt 4th Indian Inf. Div. with 5th and 11th Inf. Bde; two Field Art. Regts</p> <p>New Zealand Inf. Div. reduced forces (approximately 7.000 men)</p> <p>6th British Inf. Div with 22nd and 23rd Inf. Bde. (six Bns.) 4th Field. Art. Regt; 31st Field. Art. Regt; 7th Heavy Field. Art. Regt;</p> <p>non-divisional Troops 28th Inf. Bde. (two Bns.); Canal garrison (two Bns.) Alexandria garrison (two Bns.); 14th Heavy Art. Regt; 9th Antiaircraft Regt</p> <p>Contingents not specified. but hardly units anti-revolt. from Palestine</p>	<p>7th Arm. Div with 4th Arm Bde. with the 7th Hussars and 6th Tank; 7th Arm Bde. with the 8th Hussars and 1st Tank; 7th Support group with two Mot. Bns. 11th Hussars 3rd Horse Antitank Regt. 4th Horse Field Art. Regt 4th Indian Inf. Div. with 5th and 11th Inf. Bde; 31st Field Art. Regt 7th Heavy Field Art. Regt</p> <p>New Zealand Div. with three Inf. Bns. a mtr. Bn.; a cav Ret.; a Field Art. Regt</p> <p>6th British Inf. Div. Command with: 22nd Inf. Bde (four Bns.) at Marsa Matruh 23rd Inf. Bde (four Bns.) at the Canal;</p> <p>non-divisional Troops one Bns. at Cairo two Bns. at Alexandria batteries of various heavy types 19th Heavy Art Regt; 9th Antiaircraft Regt.</p> <p>14th Inf. Bde. (three Bns.) in the Delta</p>

On 15 January 1940 the war cabinet approved of the fundamental lines of the logistic order to reach very soon: autonomy of 90 days for nine divisions, with the understanding that every major unit in arrival on the theater of operations had to be accompanied by the relative supplies. The motor vehicles situation was not crystal clear even for the English, such as organic units -moreover much richer than those Italians -was incomplete. Initially it was tried,

however, to equip the 7th Arm. Div. about a half of the second line transport and the ability of the repair workshops was considerable was increased, but the provision was revealed soon much too ambitious, such as, considering unsatisfactory the possibility of running between the armored units and the railway terminal, Wavell was induced to judge impractical to hold Sollum in case of an Italian offensive. On the Italians the information turned out sufficiently valid. It was known the makeup of the 10th Army and the existence of some deficiencies: "the heavier weapons, as an example, the tanks and artilleries, were in a generalized manner below modern levels of efficiency (...) knew that the Italians lacked means of transport in order to make their formations fully mobile (...)" ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

At the end of May the British forces in Egypt were practically ready, although with the incomplete organic pointed out previously. The border was watched by the Egyptian frontier brigade. Behind it the 7th Arm. Div (Gen. O'Moore Creagh), on whose ordering is to detain them a moment. Majority of the unit was delivered to Egypt in 1939 as a mobile division, with two brigades: one light, with a regiment of cavalry, and one heavy with a tank regiment ⁽⁵¹⁾. In February 1940 it assumed the title of 7th armored division and the brigades, reordered, were composed each with a light regiment and a heavy, even if, temporarily, every regiment had a sensitive percentage of Mark VI tanks and every regiment of cavalry one squadron of A9 or A10. 14 April the divisional organizing was the following: an Reconnaissance unit (the 11th Hussar, with Rolls Royce 40 and Morris 38 armored cars, that until then had been part of the light brigade); the 4th Tank brigade (Gen. J S.L. Caunter) with the 7th Hussar equipped of light tanks Mark VI and the 6th Armored with *cruisers* Mark I (A9 Mark I) and Mark II (A10 Mark I); the 7th Armored brigade (Gen. H.E. Russel) with the 8th hussar and 1st Tank similarly equipped; a support group of (Gen. W.H.E. Gott) with the battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (K.R.R.C.) and the n battalion of the motorized Royal Brigade; 3rd horse artillery antitank and 14th horse Field artillery. Every regiment would have had to possess 52 tanks, but nobody reached such level. The War staff established in 1940 for the British armored division foresaw approximately 11,000 men, 342 tanks, 125 armored recon, 88 tractors, 16 field pieces and 2,400 motor vehicles with 7,500 men, 184 tanks, 24 field pieces and 630 motor vehicles of the Italian division. The disparity of the two organizing turns out still more obvious from the following comparison:

Equipment	<u>Italian Arm Div</u>	<u>British Arm Div</u>
tanks	184	342
armored car		125
small tracked vehicles		88
armored motor vehicles		19
motors vehicle		162
trucks	581	1403
special truck		55
tractors	48	57
towing		66
motorcycles	1170	649
bicycles	39	1

As far as the material, the British tanks, were of three types: light for the reconnaissance, fast and armed with machine-guns; medium or *cruisers* with average speed, armed with a gun and two machine guns; heavy or for infantry, with low speed, greater armor, armed with a gun and two machine-guns. At the beginning of hostilities this last type there was not any with units in Middle East. Any comparison with the Italian L35 made apparent, in any case the following chart provides a fairly precise idea of the technical performances of the average Armor employed by the combatants in the first operations and explains in part the tactical ease and fighting of the English 7th Arm. Div.

Main characteristics <u>technical</u>	Tanks Italian L 35	British Mark VI B	British A9	British A10
weight (tons)	3.5	5.4	12.7	14.5
crew	2 men	3 men	6 men	5 men
armament;	2 MGs.	12.7mm MG.	cann.40mm/53	cann.40mm/53
main		1 of 8 mm,		
secondary		1 of 7.7 mm	3 of 7.7 mm	2 of 7.92 mm
(MG.)				
front armor	15mm	14mm	14mm	30mm
lateral armor	9mm	8mm	8mm	8mm.
motor	43 H.P.	88 H.P	150 H.P	150 H.P
road speed	42 km/h	55 km/h	37 km/h	25 km/h
Range	150 km	210 km	240 km	160 km

7th Arm. Div (less its 7th armored brigade) was drawn up to the frontier, articulated in two parts. The large one occupied the triangle Sollum-Sidi el Barrani-Bir Scegga; the reserve, limited to 6th Tank, was near el-Maktila. Between these locations and -ed-Daba found the 5th brigade of the 4th Indian Inf. Div. (Gen. Noel M. Beresford Peirse). In the region of the Delta was the 7th armored brigade, the 4th Indian division with its 11th brigade, 14th British infantry brigade, the New Zealand brigade hardly more than the first nucleus of the respective division and numerous independent units.

It is necessary also to dwell on the organization of the summit. The High Command of the Middle East had become completing tasks and attributions during the year of Italian non-belligerence. In June he was constituted from the trio in which nobody it was *primus inter pares*: Gen. Wavell, commander in Chief for the Middle East, with the operational control of the troops located in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Cyprus, Sudan, Kenya, Aden and British Somalia; Gen. Arthur Longmore, commander in chief of the Royal Air Force for the Middle East, with responsibility on all the foretold regions; Adm. Andrew Cunningham, commander in chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. Everyone was singularly responsible in the judgment of the respective administration of the employment of their own forces; jointly they answered to the chiefs of the general staff. It cannot be said that the formula was simple, in fact in order to render the job of the commanders easier were created an joint center of information and an office of joint planning. The units of the army in Egypt (*British Troops Egypt*) was under the command Gen. Henry Maitland Wilson, which, exactly in order to obtain command exclusive addressed the active operations, decided to hold direct command the forces of the Delta and the channel and to entrust to Gen. O'Connor the advanced combat units, beginning on 17 June will assumed the title of Western Desert Force, the first nucleus of the future 8th army.

The Egyptians units were accordingly employed under the agreements taken in August 1939 between the governments of Great Britain and Egypt: patrolling of border areas, contribution to the garrison of Marsa Matruh (three battalions and antiaircraft and antitank units of artillery), surveillance of the Egyptian high desert with one mobile brigade, protection of the railroad Alexandria-Marsa Matruh, anti sabotage vigilance (nine battalions).

The British Armed Forces had serious worries. The army was above all taken with the deficiency of water and the complexities of the motorization; navy feared for the floating

emergency dry docks from which the operating possibilities of the fleet depended: if they had been destroyed the consequences on the English position in Middle East they were judged incalculable; aviation found it hard to put in place an organization of maintenance and repairs in a position of facing the environmental difficulties. In short, the main problem was a single one, the one at the bottom for any operational plan: logistics problem. But the psychological attitude was different from that of the Italian heads. In point of fact, Wavell was considering that the Italian numerical advantage was considerably reduced by a insufficient aggressive spirit and from some remarkable limitations in the field of the materials; Cunningham trusted a lot on greater on experience and the technical superiority the Mediterranean Fleet, so much so to assert that "*nothing was further away from our understanding then is that to be on the defensive*"⁽⁵²⁾; Longmore counted on the better training of the proper personal and thought that Italian Libyan aviation would quickly be worn away for defect of repairs organization and deficiencies in the materials. Training and materials: the pillars of the war. Remarkd Churchill, in London the appreciation of the Italian long range possibilities, instead, to the over appreciation. He in fact wrote: "*To a extremity of the coast, near the Egyptian border, an army of 70-80, 000 men, modernly equipped, had been patiently collected and instructed*"⁽⁵³⁾, but the truth was considerably different, unfortunately.

23 April the governments of London and Paris decided to maintain the principle not to provoke Italy, but are ready to act if it had assaulted another State (Yugoslavia or Greece). 29 April the English war cabinet approved of a specific number of precautionary measures for the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. To the middle of May the commander in chief in Middle East will receive one strategic directive, the named person of common agreement between the allies. Premised that reinforces for that theater of operations it was not the case mentioned and that the French did not have either intention nor possibility to deliver an offensive from Tunisia, the defensive became necessity in order to confer safety to Egypt, Palestine and Syria; to control the strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal and the marine communications with the French North Africa and to maintain the route through the Red Sea. A line of conduct that, for however cautious, would automatically have isolated Italian East Africa and tax Italy by strongly economic pressure. In the Mediterranean there were, moreover, two particular problems: Crete and the Dodecanese. The importance of Crete was such to render the study of measures necessary

measures necessary to prevent the island falling into enemy hands. In order not to compromise Greek neutrality a small French force was established to prepare a transfer from Syria on French warships, escorted by British units, the moment Italy in some way violated the Greek territory or was on the point of incursion. The Dodecanese had to be occupied, on this existed a principle agreement, however while the French considered this movement essential and preliminary maneuver to whatever other operation in the Eastern Mediterranean, the English estimated that an enterprise of the sort would have involved such a commitment little means would be available to deal with an emergency in the Middle East, held on account of the course of the operations in France. To conclude, Wavell ordered to Wilson to deliver an attack on the forward positions along the Libyan frontier in order "to test" the adversary and to remain as long as possible the master of the few passages for motor vehicles existing the escarpment that gives the roadway access to the desert plateau Sollum-Sidi el Barrani-Marsa Matruh, along the coastal strip. Longmore concentrated all the bombers, except a group held in reservoir, in the western desert, under the orders of the air commander R. Collishaw, authorizing him to attack Italian airports and aircraft as soon as it was positive existence of a state of war, without attacking ulterior dispositions. On 4 June the British chiefs of general staff sent a message to every commander in chief, remembering that for how well the execution of local offensives had been decided the defensive strategic was important, whenever feasible, in considering of the serious situation in Europe.

It is opportune, moreover, to review the French forces of the Levant, that is Weygand's army. Its participation in Egypt was feared because its forces had been much increased: almost 200,000 men. In truth on 10 June found in Syria under the orders of the Gen. Mittelhauser, who had replaced Weygand when these had been called to France became new commanding general, the 86th Inf. Div. (Gen. Cazaban), the 191st Inf. Div. (Gen. Sarrade) and the 192nd Inf. Div. (Gen. Richard), each of three regiments of infantry and two-three groups of artillery. Besides them there was the mobile forces regimental group of the Levant (Gen. Massiet), not large but with a battalion of F T. Tanks and one of D.1 Tanks and, a little latter, one Polish brigade. Comprising the local artillery reserve units (Gen. Caillot) unattached to the foretold grouping, reached a figure of 280,000 men with 150 tanks and 43 tractors

a figure of 80,000 men with 150 tanks and 43 tractors. Aviation was constituted from the four organic groups in that spring had been reinforced by a capable group of Curtiss fighters and from Glenn Martins bombers.

From the Italian side the defense of the Cyrenaica was founded on a very simple concept; to assure the possession of the sea and air base of Tobruk and the advanced water supply center of Bardia; to predispose the zone of maneuver of el-Adem (a score of kilometers to south of Tobruk) in order to support the life and the movement of major unit that would have been assembled; to arrange some reduction of the border (Capuzzo, Maddalena, etc). At Tobruk the defensive organization of the town consisted of a sea front, a ground front and the air defense, the first was entrusted to the navy, that had seven coastal batteries and the ship *San Giorgio*. The second had been studied since 1935 so as to protect the roadstead and gun installations for medium-caliber artillery and was including a defensive perimeter or defensive town-walls and a zone of artilleries emplacements.

The town-walls had a semicircular shape of wrapping around the naval base, from the Zeitun Wadi in the east to the Wadi es Sahel in the West, with a average depth of 400 meters. It extended for approximately 50 kilometers to the ends of the two extremities, as it was supported for the 2-3 foretold kilometers to the Wadi, it was developed completely in flat land and bare without cover of some kind. It was furnished with two classes of elements improperly calls works, arranged much like a chessboard at 500-600 meters intervals so as to concur the crossing of fires. Altogether it was dealing with 124 Works, of which 74 were on the external placement, of two types; one for the flat zones and were uniform and the others overlooked the Wadi, but both were equipped of one-two emplacements for machine-guns, a shelter for the crew and ammunition for every emplacement. In the within the works a central shelter protected against medium-caliber gun fire existed; the shelter and emplacements were joined by a communication trench partly covered by light slab of concrete. Access to the works; was sunk in. Externally trapezoidal enclosure grid or anchored cage. Parts of the front line works also had a Emplacement for antitank gun. The uncovered emplacements for machine-guns were sunk in, to level of the land, those for Army antitank only buried for thirty-forty centimeters. To each it ran

a antitank ditch ran to ellipse, approximately three meters wide and deep a meter and half, with walls and bottom in concrete, at a distance of 25-30 meters from the emplacements: in short a direct obstacle mainly against the action of crushing by tanks. The works then were grouped into 16 strongpoints, but more for requirements or convenience organic-tactics than for individuality graphical or strength.

The entire land front was subdivided in two fields, of which the eastern comprised the main communications from east and south, that is from Bardia and Bir el-Gobi. The zone of alignment of the artilleries turned out from a series of emplacements in barbettes and using a network of observatories towers, situated along the perimeter. Completing the defensive organization a permanent network of telephone links all buried and a complex of roads and tracks, which covered the entire town-walls between the two bands of works. The air defense was kept in the expertise of R. Marina and had the task first of all protect the inner harbor of the naval base and systems, and by means of subordinated the objectives of the adjacent army and aviation to the water area. Some observations.

The sea front could be said to be of adequate efficiency. Indeed, a carried out a naval action against the enemy in the first days of the hostilities came refuted and rejected without the fort enduring losses nor damages. Other naval action, effected by the English in the night that would precede the land attack, will be carried out by ships that will be kept to a very extended (approximately 18 kilometers), succeeding absolutely ineffective. The land front -considering in absolute bravery -had much to wide network, that by destroying two or three contiguous works a breach of a pair of kilometers was opened, it moreover lacked a rear defensive alignment therefore in an emergency the artilleries was tied to the resistance of the perimeter belts. Against the action of the tanks it lacks an obstacle lacked continuous anti-tank obstacles, although planned and laid out in grand scale and, above all, the great mined field was the absent. On the plan of the protection, there was, it is true, protective shelters, but the crews serving the emplacements were exposed to direct fire and to splinters of artillery projectiles, and did not exist for the Command centers and the transmission centers, and from emphasizing the extreme vulnerability of the telephone lines. The garrison of Tobruk

numbered 5-6,000 sailors of the antiaircraft and coastal batteries and, the *San Giorgio* and smaller naval units in roadstead of the sea front. The land front was entrusted to the frontier guard: the XXXI and XXXII area numbering 1,800 men each, The XXXI artillery of 40 pieces of medium-caliber guns, the XXXII artillery of 48 77/28 pieces and the XXXI engineers mixed unit. But the frontier guard introduced three large disadvantages: all of its units were formed almost entirely from personnel recalled from the reserves and recalled in the last days of May; said personal of insufficient training combining a specific ignorance of the body of war materials they had to employ. Besides the infantry forces were hardly sufficient to man the works and it did not exist, therefore, the possibility to constitute a reserve, but not even a simple reserve. It ensued that in the assembly phase the Command of the 10th Army was forced to reinforce Tobruk with a machine-gun battalion and two battalions detached from two of the black shirt divisions.

For Bardia the defense of the ground front stretched to protect the roadstead and the installations, especially the harbor, from small-caliber pieces. The fortified town-walls had same the characteristics as that of Tobruk, but the sea front was completed from two sections long, like a hinge. It comprised 113 works, of which 43 on the 33 kilometers of the external perimeter. The north front and south were naturally forts; more feeble, instead, and exposed also to easy incursions of mechanized units in west and the south-west corner sections. The southern front, moreover, introduced a double handful in relation with a forward alignment of the artilleries towards the side of Sollum.

Altogether the armament of the frontier guard to the in Cyrenaica amounted to 611 *Schwarzlose* machine-guns (war booty of the first world war), to be replaced when possible with the Fiat 35, upward of 637 being necessary, 23 guns of 47/32 antitank of 235, 31 batteries of 36⁽⁵⁴⁾. While the defensive character of the arrangement effectively permanent in Tripolitania represented an entity of good confidence, the fortification of the Cyrenaica, little advanced beyond the level of field works, incompletely armed and garrisoned, badly equipped, it gave insufficient confidence, above all by the lack of an continuous antitank obstacle and complexes consisting of antitank guns. In December of 1939 they had been arranged for new jobs respecting the obstacles, the command posts, the refitting and the improvement of the defensive system, the armor plating of many works and the development of the water systems, all involving

a expense of 280 million, but the performance of the plan was hardly begun.

The Italian configuration comprised to cover articulated in two fields: coastal, or Amseat., capacities of the fort of Bardia, Fort Capuzzo, the garrison of Sidi Omar (two position machine-gun companies) and one motorized machine-gun company; inside, of Giarabub, with Fort Maddalena, the garrison of Giarabub (three position machine-gun companies and one section of 65/17) and one motorized machine-gun company. Behind them was the 10th Army (Gen. Mario Berti), concentrated in the coastal strip and ordered on two Corps. the XXI army corps (Gen. Lorenzo Dalmazzo), with the *Marmarica* (62nd) Inf Div. (Gen. Ruggero Tracchia) and 1st Libyan Div. (Gen. Sibille), behind the frontier blocking the Sollum-Tobruk road and Bir esc Sceferzen-Bir el Gobi, and with the *Cirene* (63rd) Inf Div. (Gen. Carl Spatocco) in the second formation in the area of el-Adem. The XXII Army Corps (Gen. Enrico Pitassi Mannella) was concentrated on the height of Acroma, escort of the *Trig Capuzzo* and the *Trig el Abd*, with the 4th CC.NN. Div. (Gen. Fabio Merzari), it had elements at Bir Hacheim and Bir el-Gobi, and the *Catanzaro* (64th) Inf. Div. (Gen. Spinels), whose regiments of infantry had arrived from Italy on the eve of the hostilities and were beginning the concentration. The 2nd Libyan Div., lastly, was in course of disembarkation at Benghazi.

In short very insufficient uniformity was a theme of the army. Out of five divisions, two reached the organic levels (*Marmarica* (62nd) and *Cirene* (63rd)); one was the Libyan, about 7,000 men and 24 pieces of 77/28, therefore it was worth less than the much deprecated binary; one was of fascists and beyond the reduced force it introduced the disadvantages of the unsatisfactory organization and the insufficient training; one, finally, the *Catanzaro* (64th), as said it was completed and with much hard work that two months after was still inefficient. In any case, for a reason or purpose of useful comparison, the main relative organic data to the forces of the average divisions of Italian and British infantry are brought back in the following page. Moreover the operating design could not just be to say incisive. To leading the foreseen surprise attack on Sollum, than the first order of war of the C.S.F.A.A.S. prohibited to put into effect, at the front of the hypothetical British offensive lead with medium tanks became unavoidable on the nearer forts or the isolation of the desert land with the consequences easy to imagine. As far as the zone of maneuvers at el-Adem, the work of improvement which followed them could not attribute mobility to those who possessed insufficient attitude. The very weight of the cited shortcomings, is without a doubt the power of an unsure judgment

**FORCES AND MEANS OF THE ITALIAN AND BRITISH INFANTRY
DIVISIONS IN 1940 IN NORTH AFRICA**

the Forces	Italian N.A. type Inf. Div.	British 1939(**) organizing Inf. Div.
Organic Personal	10,978	13,863
machine gunners	262	644
Machine-guns	232(*)	56
Mortars from 45 millimeter and 2"	111	108
Mortars from 81 antitank millimeter and 3 "	12	18
Anti-Tank Rifles	-	361
antiaircraft pieces from 20 millimeter	16	-
antitank Pieces from 47/32	8	27
Pieces from campaign	56	72
Light trucks	-	28
armored half tracks	-	50
caterpillars	-	90
Motors vehicle	-	117
Trucks	398	1,528
special Trucks	-	24
Tractors	36	156
Towing	-	221
Motorcycles	249	670
Bicycles	180	330

(*) Due essentially to the presence of a machine-gun battalion

(* *) In 1941 the organic tables are revised and considerably upgraded.

The very weight of the cited shortcomings is without a doubt the power of an unsure on the inception of the war in North Africa from the Italian side. A lot simply: for defect of imagination or insufficient importance attributed to the theater of operations, the war in the desert had not been "seen", and that weighed in serious way in the training of the troops and the field of the motorization. The aerial units of Cyrenaica, which is of the eastern sector of the Libya, were composed as follows:

- 10th Bomber Stormo (Group) (SM-81) at el-Adem;
- 14th Bomber Stormo (Group) (SM -79) at Benina;
- 8th Fighter Gruppo (Wing) (CR-32) at Acroma (local T .2);
- 10th Fighter Gruppo (Wing) (CR-32) at Benina;
- 159th Ground Attack squadron (Ca-310) at Acroma;
- 73rd Recon. Gruppo (Wing) (Ro-37) at el-Adem;
- 143rd Maritime Recon. Squadron (Cant.Z.501) at Menelao;
- 2nd Group Colonial Garrison Aviation (*Ghibli*) at el-Adem.

In total the war aircrafts efficient they numbered to 51 bombers, 52 fighters, 6 ground attack, 12 Recon. or Naval Recon. 21 *Ghibli*.

- 1 Enno Von RINTELEN. *Mussolini l'alleato*, Corso, Rome 1952, pg. 85. Hitler, among other things, displayed much perplexity on the fact that the war declaration was formulated with an advance notice of several hours, but shows of little convincing affirmation in how much Mussolini had explicitly communicated such as his intention in the message of 2 June (*Hitler e Mussolini*, Rizzoli, Milan 1946, p. 49).
- 2 MARIO MONTANARI, *The Italian army to the eve of the second world war*, Historical Office of the General Staff of Army (USE), Rome 1982, pp. 166-171).
- 3 F.5569 dated 4.6.1940 of the Chief of the General Staff and f.l/D dated 8.6.1940 from Mussolini, which operating as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Vds. see M. MONTANARI, op. cited, p. 344 and seg. The highest military charges were as follows. Chief of General Staff, Mar. Pietro Badoglio; sub-chief (title endured after the war declaration), Gen. Ubaldo Soddu; Chief of General Staff of R. Army, Mar. Rodolfo Graziani, sub-chief, Gen. Mario Roatta; Chief of General Staff of R. Marina, Adm. Domenico Cavagnari, sub-chief, Adm. Edoardo Somigli; Chief of General Staff of R. Aeronautica, Gen. Francisco Pricolo, sub-chief, Gen. Giuseppe Santoro. The assignments of Undersecretary of State were covered respective by Gen. Soddu, by Adm. Cavagnari and by Gen. Pricolol.
- 4 Order of battle on the date of June 1940, appendix 1, and summary of major units mobilized at such date, appendix 2.
- 5 ANGELO JACHINO. *Tramonto di una grande marina*, Mondadori, Milan 1960, p. 131.
- 6 The naval forces overseas depended on the local Armed Forces High Commands and, consequently, about their comparisons Supermarina had to follow through hierarchical of the previous.
- 7 GIUSEPPE FIORAVANZO. *La guerra nel Mediterraneo*. Statistical data, Historical Office of the General Staff of Marina (USM), Rome 1950.
- 8 ANDREW B. CUNNINGHAM. *L'odissea di un marinaio*, Garzanti, Milan 1958, p. 49.
- 9 In August 1940 the Supreme Command transmitted to the General Staff of R. Aeronautica, for the examination and the opinion, agreed to a plan of actions to realize the temporary disabling of the Suez Canal by means of scuttling of steamboats or aerial bombing. Superaereo answered that the first type of avoided action, evidently, to their jurisdiction and however it appeared late and that the second introduced remarkable technical difficulties for realization. In any case, as for the canal regularly made top only the supply for Egypt coming from the Indian Ocean and irregularly from the Mediterranean, even if the canal became more or less obstructed to passage, the traffic would have equally made port at Suez and Port Said, with successive change of transport means.
- 10 GIUSEPPE FIORAVANZO, *La guerra nel Mediterraneo*. The naval actions, volume 1, USM, Rome 1959, p. 72.
- 11 A. CUNNINGHAM, op. cited, p. 50. I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 1. London 1954, p. 91, confirmation the battleships, but indicates only 9 cruisers and 29 naval destroyer.
- 12 RAYMOND DE BELOT. *La Marine française pendant la campagne 1939-1940*, Plon, Paris 1954.
- 13 *Bretagne* and *Provence* with 10 guns of 340 mm, *Dunquerque* and *Strasbourg* with 8 guns of 330 mm.

- 14 The *Resolution* with 8 guns of 381 mm, but which reached Gibraltar the 13 June.
- 15 *Vittorio Veneto* and *Littorio* with 9 guns of 381 mm (9th division), *Cavour* and *Cesar* with 10 guns of 320 mm (5th division). Besides them it is necessary to keep in mind, even if still not in the fleet, the modernized *Duilio* with 10 guns of 320 mm, that was, delivered to active service 10 June, was found at Pola for such and such tests and will reach Taranto 15 July. The twin *Doria* will enter the fleet 26 October. Computing the *Duilio* in the number of the battleships available at outbreak of hostilities does not change the fact that it still was not on the line. Instead he induces to criticize the slowness of the work, due to imminent of the events: *Duilio* and *Doria* were in yard from April 1937.
- 16 *Malaya*, *Warspite*, *Ramillies* and *Royal Sovereign* with 8 guns of 381 mm.
- 17 *Lorraine*.
- 18 *Eagle*.
- 19 Without to counting four naval destroyer sent to the Red Sea.
- 20 A. CUNNINGHAM. *op. Cited*, p. 46.
- 21 GIUSEPPE SANTORO, *L'Aeronautica italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Esse, Rome 1957, vol.I. p. 88.
- 22 The contradictory of the data supplied from the French sources, comprised by those officials, leave many uncertainties. According to La Chambre, minister of aviation from 1938-40, at the beginning of May the French Air Force numbered 2,122 altogether *modern* fighters and 461 bombers. But of them, only less than half was found on the northeast front: 800-1000 fighters and approximately 200 bombers. Gen. Vuillemin, head of aviation, declared, on the date of the May, of 580 French fighters and 160 English. The undeniable difference between total availability and present at the front nobody known has given reasonable explanations. However, between 10 May and 12 June the industry supplied the others 668 fighters and 355 bombers (WILLIAM L. SHIRER. *The fall of France*, Einaudi, Torino 1971, p. 726 and seg.).
- 23 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR. *op. cited*, and English Air *Historical Branch* (from FRANCO BANDINI, *Technique of the defeat*, Sugar, Milan 1963, p. 530).
- 24 For a geographic picture of Libya is brought back in appendix 3. The local names are brought back in the text, the sketches and the papers according the writing already used in the previous works of the Historical Office on the operations in North Africa, correspondent to the Italian cartography of the age.
- 25 Covers situation to June, appendix 4, and 10 June, appendix 5.
- 26 Covers situation, appendix 6.
- 27 Covers situation, appendix 7.
- 28 Commission of enquete parlementaire, *Temoignages*, t. VI p. 1790, P.U.F., Paris 1952.
Cfr. superior and very documentary ANDRE TRUCHET, *L 'armistice de 1940 et l'Afrique du nord*" P.U.F., Paris 1955, p. 331 and seg.
- 29 In the period 21 May- 7 June embarked the 84th Inf. Div. (Gen. Ardant du Picq) and 85th Inf. Div. (Gen. Wemaere), located respective in the area of Tunisi and Souk Ahras, as well as 344th infantry and the 67th tank battalion, for total 31,000 men, 45 tanks and 1500 motor vehicles.
- 30 Situation on the date of 12 June 1940 supplied to the Italian commission of control and confirmed in 1981 from the historical Service of the French army.
- 31 Strangely, while in the per diem historian of the C.S.F.A.A.S. a number is attributed to the French divisions, in documents of the S.I.M. they figure the temporary denominations: division Tunisi bis, Costantina ter, etc.
- 32 The 181st, 182nd and 183rd divisions were of protection, that is to say of 3rd category and destined to remain in Africa

- 33 the situation delivered to the Italian commission (f. 348 given *DDSA/2* date 9/6/1940) 373,045 men, but a comparison with the previous data concurs to assert that of on purpose they had omitted the 40,000 men of supplementary Moroccan troops at least. A. TRUCHET, *op. cited*, pp.373-375.
 - 34 find that at the moment of the entrance into war of Italy a clear number of ships transporting troops to France returned to Africa.
 - 35 The danger coming from Spanish Morocco had been strongly exaggerated on French side. According to the commander of the troops of Morocco, Gen. Francois, from person in charge Nogues to exactly make a study for the fast elimination and surprise of the bridgehead represented by Spanish Morocco, nothing was done, for the insufficiency of means available for the presence of five Spanish divisions that could be in short time be reinforced from Germanic divisions. At best, in fact, at the receipt of news from the military attaché to Madrid, a dozen German divisions, of which five or six armored or motorized, were marked to the Franco-Spanish frontier, therefore these last ones could cross the Iberian peninsula and Algesiras and Cadice to pass the strait, one a day. In ten or fifteen days maximum the five Spanish divisions of Morocco would have been reinforced from as many Germans, supported by a powerful air force.
 - 36 A. TRUCHET, *op. cited*, p. 258. MAURICE GAMELIN. *Al servizio della Patria*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1947, cite alone three D.I tank battalions and a battalion of H.35, for a total of 200 tanks.
 - 37 old equipment but also always true tanks in comparison to the Fiat Italian L.33 and L.35.
 - 38 Resident general of France at Tunis.
 - 39 complex Works resistant to the medium-caliber guns, fortified of two-four emplacements for machine-guns in metallic turrets.
 - 40 simple Works in concrete for refining and giving depth to the system.
 - 41 The following batteries were in existence: 9 of 75/27, of which 4 with three pieces; 27 of 77/28, of which 24 with three pieces; 2 of 105/28 with four pieces; 4 of 120/25, of which 2 with three pieces; 7 of 149/12 with four pieces; 5 of 149/36 with four pieces and one of 210/8 with two pieces.
 - 42 Per diem historian of the Armed forces high command Armed Forces in N.A. (DSCSAS), f. 01/200.741 date 11.5.1940 of comandante superiore, appendix 8.
 - 43 Memoranda given by the Duce 13.5.1940 for the undersecretary for the war, appendix 9.
 - 44 Until to 1940 the English 7th Armored Division was articulated according to the 1939 ordering: one light brigade constituted from a cavalry regiments and one heavy brigade constituted from tank regiments, on basis to the type of material in equipment. Ordering situation modified in 1940 such as, both the brigades adopting a mixed structure, however the change escape the S.I.M., for which until to 1941 to the Italian Commanders it came thought listing the old structure.
- Under the profile of use, the division was equipped with Mk VIB light tanks, or previous models, of reconnaissance (even if used like real and proper combat tanks), cruisers light (A-9) and heavy (A-10 and 13). Moreover there were the close supports or close support tanks (a cruiser with a howitzer of 3.7 inches in place of the 40 mm gun) in equipment to the support group, third fundamental element of the division.
- Under the technical aspect the things changed slightly. The English material was classified as light tank until 10 tons, medium until 20 tons and heavy beyond 20 tons. Therefore all the cruisers entered in the category of the medium tanks: it is light the Mk I (A-9) from 12.7 tons., the heavy Mk II (A-10) from 14.4 tons., Mk III (A-12) from 14.2 tons. and Mk IV (A-13) from 15 tons.

The *close supports* were category of its own, despite being *cruisers*. Accordingly, it will easily carry the source of discrepancies and mistakes of quote from Italian side, especially since the same British sources were promiscuous use of names: as we shall see, the Generals Wavell and O'Connor in their reports speak of "heavy tanks" sometimes alluding to heavy cruisers, sometimes to infantry tanks (i.e. *Matilda*).

45 Of 6th Inf. Div. only command existed, just arrived from Palestine and transformed on 17 June in command of the Western Desert Force.

46 ARTHUR BRYANT, *Tempo di guerra*, Longanesi, Milano 1960, p. 241 and WINSTON CHURCHILL, *La seconda guerra mondiale*, part II, vol. II, Mondadori, Milano, 1949 p. 115.

47 Dispatch of Gen. Archibald p. Wavell on *Operations in the Middle East from august 1939 to November 1940*, sent to the War Office on December 10, 1940 and published as the third supplement to the London Gazette of June 1946.

48 H.F. JOSLEN, *Orders of Battle of the Second World War 1939-1945*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1960. To keep in mind that the British Brigade corresponded roughly to the Italian Regiment and the regiment to Italian Tank battalion.

The cavalry regiments and armored personnel carriers were usually ordered with a regimental command and three squadrons, each with a command platoon (two cruisers and two close supports) and four platoons (three tanks each). The regimental command had four light tanks or *cruisers* and 20 scout cars (armored cars). The Hussars had a staff or different, as Divisional reconnaissance unit: a regimental command (three armored cars) and three squadrons with a platoon command and five platoons exploring. Altogether had 57 armored cars armed with Bren submachine gun and Boys anti-tank rifle.

The artillery regiments were ordered with two or more batteries, equivalent to the Italian group, each about 12 pieces with mechanical tow.

49 After that level was raised gradually due to increased non- divisional units.

50. I.S.O PLAYFAIR, op. cited, ch. V.

51 As mentioned above, both the armored cavalry regiments and armored or armored personnel carriers had the structure of battalion. However, while the first, belonging to the Mechanized Cavalry continued to carry the number and the name of the mounted regiments of which they were the heirs, the latter were distinguished by a truly indicative of battalion. In the British army, in fact, there was *only one* Tank Regiment, *Royal Tank Regiment* (derived from the *Royal Tank Corps*), The King was the Colonel in Chief. The indicative 1st and 6th *Tank Regiment* were actually indicating the 1st and 6th Battalion *Royal Tank Regiment*. The Regiment in question was born in 1939 including tank units of the *Royal Armored Corps*, established in 1938.

52 A. CUNNINGHAM, op. cited above, p. 46.

53 W. CHURCHILL, op. cited above, p. 116.

54 There were 16 batteries of 77/28, and one of 105/28, seven of 120/25, and one of 149/12 and four of 149/35.

THE FIRST OPERATIONS

1. EVENTS ON THE TUNISIAN FRONT

To speak about war events on the western Libyan sectors is surely excessive. The beginning of the hostilities was marked by patrol activity of enemy coverage and in successive days they were followed only by a few isolated actions against border blockhouses. The insufficient participation of air forces, on the French side a raid on Tripoli and one Italian on Biserta, and nothing from the naval. The information that reached the Comando Superiore of Tripoli extended to diminish every worry quickly: June 16th, two days after the entrance of the Germans into Paris, the Command historical diary minutes recorded that three whole divisions and 15,000 men seemed to have left Tunisia, embarking for France. Nevertheless what could happen in the French North Africa remained of supreme importance. In part for this, in part because the forces that garrisoned the defensive system in south of Tunisia did not turn out reduced, the principle of the defense remained solid and absolute validity. And, in truth, the attention of Balbo was all addressed to Cyrenaica, towards which he was moving troops.

In Europe the situation was deteriorating. At Bordeaux, new French president's home, Gen. Weygand, for a short time Commander in Chief of the Army, was convinced that the allies had lost not only the battle of France, but also the entire war. Therefore he pressed the government take responsibility to ask for the armistice and was opposed to the idea of Reynaud to continue to fight in the African colonies -as previously the same Reynaud had intentionally left undefended to aid in the battle underway in the motherland -behind the protection of the fleet. As the concrete possibilities to continue the war with troops recovered from Metropolitan territory and with those of that existed in the empire diametrically opposite opinions. Reynaud had thought to call to arms two classes (250,000 men) and ship them to Africa but Gen. Colson, Chief of General Staff of the army, quickly objected that they would lack even guns for arming them and Adm. Darlan, Commander in Chief of the Navy, declared that even with British aid he would not be successful to transfer them overseas Reynaud, then,

then, was oriented to call a single class and to acquire arms in Spain and America, but a long message dated 2 June Gen. Noguès put in evidence that hardly 20,000 recruits could have been received in North Africa, that always management and materials were supplied from the motherland. This dispatch represented a large menu for those who thought the continuation of the fight overseas impossible, but Reynaud dismissed Gen. de Gaulle, that on 5 June had entered into the movement as undersecretary for the war, to deepen the issue and on 8 June, in the first Council of Ministers held at Paris for the remaining ministers, still announcing of being decided to continue to fight and to transfer to Algeria. Perhaps he was deceived, but the political concept was valid. However, the press of events and various pressures forced him on 16 June to hand in his Resignation and to pass his hand to the Mar. Petain, who, still before negotiations of armistice with the Germany were begun, at 12:30 hrs of the 17th announced by radio to the French people: *"with the heavy heart I say to you today that it is necessary to stop the fighting,,"* But in Algeria the wind was blowing very differently. Listening to the speech of Petain, Gen. Noguès immediately sent a protest directed to Weygand:

"All the Africa of the north are Dismayed. The ground, air and naval troops, ask to continue the fight in order to save honor and preserve North Africa for France. (..). Are ready, if the government is of agreement, independently himself assume the responsibility of this conduct (,,). With the aid of the fleet and of the air forces assistance we can resist" ⁽¹⁾,

and the day after, 18 June, addressed directly to Pétain:

"All the troops, as do the French and Muslim population of Africa of the north, demand of me to respectfully ask your government to continue the fight and to defend the North African territory (,,). As to yield to the foreigner their territories without their consent and without having fought a Betrayal (..).

With our fleets intact would be considered, with the aerial units that are crossing the Mediterranean and with some reinforcements and materials in the picture we will be able to resist long, and in any case enough in order to contribute to the defeat of our enemies .

It is therefore with burning insistence but with respect that I ask the government (...) to come continue or to allow continuing the fight from North Africa" ⁽²⁾

As one looks at a very different attitude from what was clear from the letter of 2 June, but Noguès had then not become very aware of the drama that metropolitan France was living therefore the objections raised, more or less acceptable in normal circumstances, to some eyes he became very skillful for the single fact of having to make virtue of necessity, At that time Petain and Weygand who were asking what were the German conditions and to gave consent to the departures for Africa, while Darlan quietly sent an officer to Noguès to represent the eventuality that the government decided the continuation of the war in the empire and in order to ask for housing in Algeria for the 80 officers and the 5-600 men for his Commander in Chief, On 22 June Weygand placed a question to Noguès: clearly excluding the shipment of reinforces on part of the metropolitan territory, what were the possibilities of resistance in North Africa in the hypothesis of an attack of the Axis from the Spanish Riff? and what the probabilities had a land and air offensive from Tunisia on Tripoli? The answer had to be delivered to Gen. Koeltz, on the same day he left for Algeria, it seems that in the ' waiting every decision should be suspended, Instead it wasn't so, Petain and Weygand by now knew the armistice clauses and they had been convinced that to sign it was the only sensible thing to do, thinking irresolvable the problem of the cadets and the materials to sent to Algeria. Consequently, Weygand, who in the atmosphere of capitulation extinguished right away every vain ambition, did not hesitate to paint in catastrophic inks the situation, According to Baudouin, Foreign Minister, he affirmed to the war council that North Africa had been pirated of the only four truly efficient divisions, Noguès continued to protest the insufficiency of his equipment, the ammunition availabilities did not allow even daily fire, did not exist tanks newer then 1918 models: what could be hoped? They remained four mixed divisions in North Africa and few less in Syria, for in addition to lacking in modern armament ⁽³⁾. If not in the evening of the 22nd, when Gen. Koeltz was still in Algeria, Noguès answered by dispatch in a very different tone and of an importance that could be determining:

"Africa of the north, with its current resources, air force reinforcements in route, whose value is inestimable, and assembly of the fleet, it is in a position to long resist the initiatives of the enemy. The threat from that Spanish flank, mark my warning, constitutes the main danger, must be eliminated with a preventive action from

launched as soon as Italian or German forces enter Spanish territory.

I can undertake this operation, that convenient political pressure will have as main support and religious for the aboriginal masses, with my forces alone capturing some element from Tunisia, where temporary I would remain on the defensive. The latter probabilities would grow remarkably if possible were reinforced right away with armored units, antitank and antiaircraft equipment and eventually with major units.

(...) Land operations in Tripolitania are under way. They cannot cover the nature of an attack of great breath during the warm season. And it is however possible to provoke limited rebellions and to create insecurity in the enemy rears by means of auxiliary units guided by Tripolitanian refugees As against, it will be possible in September-October to begin offensive operations in depth with the means of North Africa, reinforced from new units created with the British and American aid.

These operations could be facilitated with a contemporary attack from the English on Cyrenaica and even swaying of the Italian population in Ethiopia would contribute on par to aid them.

Thanks to the 600 airplane of which now at our dispose, Africa of the north is in a condition to not only to strongly support the land and Naval but ourselves take part in operations with the maximum effectiveness against the vital points of Libya and Italy.

It would be however indispensable that re-supply aircraft ammunitions was assured if they do not take from the motherland at the least from England.

The fuel supplies and the ammunitions correspond to two months of operations. It must begin at once to finally replace them.

I believe necessary (...) at last attempt to in order in the next few days to send all the troops, all the personnel and all the possible material (...).

Finally it is necessary that supplying and reinforcements for the North Africa are received only from England and America" ⁽⁴⁾.

It was a panorama, all together, trusting which one the commander in Chief of the North African theater of operations made, nevertheless did not have a reply: it only does not turn out to have reached the acquaintance of the Council of Ministers, but even its natural continuation, that is to say the report of Gen. Koeltz, retuning to Bordeaux on the 23rd, seems to have been altered. According to the minister of finances, Bouthillier, the report arrived by mail with extreme evidence the intrinsic weakness of the troops of Africa and no hope to resist to an offensive from the Spanish Riff. Therefore to transfer themselves overseas would

simply serve to attract German and Italian and to uselessly provoke Spain on to the field, extending the conflict ⁽⁵⁾. Except that Gen. Koeltz interrogated after the end of the war by the parliamentary inquiry commission, declared on his honor not to have either spoken in front of the war cabinet nor according to Noguès that North Africa would find it impossible to resist. In all probability, therefore, it was Weygand that referred the report of Koeltz to the Council of Ministers, attributing to these last gratuitous considerations and distorting the telegrams of Noguès. In any case, even if Weygand had knowingly altered the situation, Noguès continued to telegraph. The 23rd still protesting that the demobilization of the North African troops could not be acceptable, constituting, with air force and the fleet, the last guarantee of a dignified peace, and concluded that *"If the government does not have the certainty of honorable conditions of peace the goal is to save the future of the country, we must come and continue the fight in Africa"*. Indeed, he wrote to Weygand of moving himself to Algeria in order to assume the defense of the empire. Weygand did not appreciate these solicitations and answered on the 24th very sarcastically:

"The elements in your possession do not allow you to judge the situation that the government must face, or estimate the decisions that the same situation imposes to it, which however necessary and contrary to the honor of the country".

The evening of the 25th Noguès returned to his office for the last time:

"I have passed the greater part of the past night trying to calm the delegations that asked me to take the command of the forces of the empire still not defeated (...).

Create the most explicit reserves circa the measures of demobilization and the conditions in which they will be defined and controlled (...).

The government, acting in a rude atmosphere, has been in a position to take into account of the moral elements and the force that North Africa represents and that, with Navy and Air Force, they would have allowed us to resist until the exhaustion of our enemies. It will be mourned bitterly (...).

In order not to divide France in two, I personally will remain at my post as long as there is danger, to fulfill that mission of sacrifice that covers my face with shame. But as soon as I estimate that peace is insured, I will ask you to excuse me from my assignment" ⁽⁶⁾.

The telegram provoked an indignant reaction on part of the council of Ministers, Weygand ordered the dissolution of the Command of the forces of North Africa and the withdrawal of Noguès to Morocco

as general in residence. On the real feasibility of the continuation of the war in the French empire, Weygand and Noguès were evidently opposites. First, the based ones on the state limited efficiency of the troops overseas and the sparsely of much resources and ascribing to the German strategic guidelines exceeded her capacities, supported always that their prospect of a fight would had translated into a semblance of resistance: the Germans would have invaded Morocco and Algeria while the Italians would be entering Tunisia. Noguès, instead, thought that having the French and English fleets and recovering the maximum of the air force and a good part of the metropolitan army, the empire would have had the ability to face, at least temporary, a war situation that they also could not have war wage on them. If Weygand appeared pessimist too much, perhaps Noguès sinned of optimism, but it is undeniable that during the negotiations of armistice and soon after very many aircraft flew to Africa. More than 2,000 aircraft of every type abandoned France: a census made on the 20th of July by the Italian commission of control will state, in fact, the existence of 2,648 modern aircraft, among which were 710 fighters and 431 bombers. Of these as many as 700 arrived between the 17th and the 25th of June ⁽⁷⁾. As far as the Army, Noguès had sent three officers to the motherland to drag men and equipment and embark them for Algeria and Tunisia, the existing confusion being useful ⁽⁸⁾. Initially the minister of the war made to arrest them, but after a few hours the men and the arms rendezvousing near the Mediterranean bases urgently decided to send to the Africans ports all. It is also true that next day, the 24th, Weygand complicated the situation again ordering that only some ships could sail, however between the 15th and the 24th of June sixty ships left Marseilles and Tolone, two thirds of which reached Africa between the 24th and the 28th, with 15,500 men and many thousand of tons of material.

These movements were not escaped the Italians and on the June 22 Badoglio -the day in which the Gen. Georges authorized the surrender of the army group, encircled in the Maginot -he wrote to Balbo warning him that the remarkable flow between France and the ports and airports of Africa confirmed possibility that here the French government meant to move the hostilities to North Africa and that therefore it became opportune to adopt precautionary measures. Balbo, as it has been said, looked above all towards Egypt, was limited to council the return to the 5th Army units yielded to the 10th and to reinforce of one fighter wings for Tripolitania.

But in that moment the eyes of all, friends and enemies, were addressed to the French fleet, whose fate appeared to determine for the developments of the war. In Berlin it was enough that the warships, except a clear number for the defense of the colonies, were demobilized and disarmed under German or Italian control and berthed in national ports (not in those of North Africa. London since the 16th of June had made know to its allies at the start of preliminary contacts of the armistice "*as long as the French fleet sails immediately for British ports*" ⁽⁹⁾ and in a good account on 17th, had news of the fall of the Reynaud government, clarified to Adm. Cunningham "*if France concludes a separate peace is necessary to make every effort so that the French fleet moves under our control, otherwise it must be sunk*" ⁽¹⁰⁾. From the other side of the Atlantic, President Roosevelt was careful on the naval issues, more for expediency than the sensibilities of PM Churchill, than a flash with lightning the perspective of Great Britain forced to submit to the Hitlerian empire and of an English fleet joining to that Japanese, Italian, German and French with the support of the German industry and outlined they the unavoidable consequences for the United States. Therefore from Washington he sent at once the hardest message: the French government was warned against allowing its fleet to surrender to the Germans, or else "*it will lose in order always the Friendship and the good will of the United States*. In France, Adm. Darlan was determined not to leave the ships to the enemy, but he was not inclined to give them to the English, now that; like Petain and Weygand, he thought of being able to use the fleet as a means of pressure in order to force from the German better conditions of armistice, would be impossible to obtain if it had found itself in British ports. In the night of the 18th, therefore, he ordered that the *Richelieu* from Brest and the *Jean Bart* from St. Nazaire sail at once for Morocco and in the following days make arraignments so that all the warships in the English ports, especially at Plymouth and Portsmouth, make passage immediately for North Africa. As on the other hand, the English admiralty blocked everywhere: it was the first step towards an open conflict.

"on the 21st of June the German and French delegations gathered at Rethondes. For the French it was dealing with accepting without arguments the 24 articles of the convention of armistice. After feverish attempts at amendments, they folded at the top and at 18:50 hrs of the 22nd Gen. Huntzinger signed the treaty. Article 23 established that the armistice entered into force six hours after a similar pact concluded with Italy.

On 18 June Hitler and Mussolini had been meeting in Monaco in order to agree the armistice conditions to imposing on France, who had just made the request through Spain. During train trip, Ciano had consulted Gen. Roatta, Adm. De Courten and Gen. Perino, all to the continuation, in order to establish in the general terms the Italian guidelines of the proposal. The notes, introduced by Brennero to Mussolini who approved it, foresaw, among other things, the Italian occupation of French territory up to the Rodano, of Corsica, of Tunisia and of the Coast of Somalis, of the naval bases of Algeria, Oran, (Mers el-Kebir) and Casablanca; as well as the faculty to occupy anytime, until to the reestablishment of peace, the strategic points and the systems thought necessary to the purpose of military operations ⁽¹¹⁾.

In the afternoon, during the course of the convention, Generals Roatta and Keitel were allowed to enter in the hall where the two heads of government and the Foreign ministers found themselves. Hitler, already had been made current of the Italian thought, placed at once in evidence the opportunity not occupy *all* of France, yes formally to concur to French existence an independent France and to avoid the creation of a government in exile, in Great Britain or elsewhere, then he agreed upon explicitly the main conditions indicated by Italy: the occupation until to the Rodano and that of Corsica, of Tunisia and of Gibuti.

Excluded to expect the delivery of the fleet, did not speak about air force ⁽¹²⁾. In the return trip, Mussolini called Roatta and he informed him of other particular of his talk with Hitler. There had been the expressed intention to avoid the participation of American and a second to winter of war, give them the clean feeling of wanting to conclude in very soon a peace with Great Britain, but *"to campaign against it as only vaguely pointed out, like it was hypothetical...* As far as the guidelines on the demands to formulate during negotiations of peace, it had been agreed that to Italy would have gone: Nizzardo, Corsica, Tunisia and Algeria, Gibuti and Somaliland, a connection between Libya and the empire (Sudan). Of Malta not even one word. Egypt would have to replace the alliance with England that of Italy.

As soon as arriving at Rome, Roatta - with the understanding of the two other General Staffs - proceeded by order of Badoglio to the compilation of the armistice convention on the basis of the outcomes of Monaco. The morning of the 21st he delivered the text to Badoglio who assented, hence both approached by Mussolini who in his turn approved the

document. The meeting attending of the text of the armistice of Rethondes was broken off as Gen. Marras, military attaché to Berlin, was brining it to Rome by airplane that afternoon. At 19:15 hours Badoglio and Roatta convened at the Palazzo Venezia. Mussolini had as soon as received reassurances of the text from Ambassador Alfieri and stated that it corresponded to the agreements made at Monaco. To this point, with great astonishment of his translator, he stated that it was not permissible to ask the delivery of territory not occupied by the army, also in order not to create a situation that would lead the French to reject the armistice, that instead Hitler absolutely meant to conclude. The objections and the protests of Roatta were in vain. However Mussolini added he had already sent a telegram to Berlin in order to explain the new point of view. Therefore abdicated the occupation of Tunisia, the North African bases and Gibuti. Hitler answered rather annoyed, *"that we are free to do as we please"* ⁽¹³⁾. It is known that on Mussolini's change of thought he was probably influenced the fear that French refusal of those conditions and that the German abandoned us, in the sense of surrendering to the French limiting of the demands. Two years latter, on occasion of a visit to Italy, Goering was asked *"because at the time of the negotiation of armistice with France the occupation of Tunisia had not been demanded ...* According to Bismarck, councilman at the Rome embassy, Mussolini *"showed himself embarrassed and did not have an appropriate answer"*: he admitted that it had been an error ⁽¹⁴⁾. It was an error that was most expensive. He is however right to put in evidence that while Roatta and Cavagnari will insist, is also uselessly, on the issue of the North African bases, Badoglio showed incline to a much debatable moderation on the strategic plan and he did not try to lead Mussolini back to the decisions of Monaco. As far as Hitler, he's *"disinterestedness -had a very continental war conception -for the Mediterranean.* Also Balbo, from far away, had followed the evolving of the political-military situation, but with many clear ideas on what he would have wanted to make. On 20 June in fact had addressed to Badoglio:

"(...) I ask you, once news of the armistice with France is reached, to order first a highly encapsulated occupation of Tunisia, that I would carry out with 5th Army motorcyclists and cavalry and that would allow me to take French material with which would resolve great part of my problem". ⁽¹⁵⁾

Badoglio answered that the armistice conditions did not foresee the occupation of Tunisia and that,

they foresaw the occupation of Tunisia and that, therefore, attention was necessary to concentrate all on the Eastern frontier⁽¹⁶⁾. At 00:35 French hour or 01:35, Italian time, of the 25 June the war with France was ended. The one with Great Britain continued.

2. THE INITIAL EVENTS ON THE EGYPTIAN FRONT.

The difference to the Tunisian front, that the Egyptian began to give some concern, demonstrating a small mobile forces, good timing and an animated offensive spirit could quickly heat the background and above all revealing first symptoms of different type of war regarding what was conventionally imagined. Thoughtless but for a common passive wait for events. Some week before the beginning of the hostilities, the Command of the 10th Army carried out in the area of el Adem with a maneuver the upper echelons, in this the "Red" command, that is to say the advance of English troops that turned out from the information, was entrusted to Col. D'Avanzo, as a tank crewman. Well, these created a remarkable disorder in the "Blue", indicating the remarkable possibilities of the armored formations and harden the fact of infiltrations in depth, surprise attacks to isolated static elements, etc. Not by chance on *16 June did Balbo write to Badoglio*: "(...) if I was the English commander would already be beyond *Tobruk* " ⁽¹⁷⁾ In every manner, if that theoretical experience was worrisome did not provoke changes of any kind.

Wavell had ordered the 7th Armored Division to decidedly engage the Italian frontier positions themselves at the beginning of the hostilities. It was be simply a matter of actions conducted by large patrols or tactical groups of an larger entity, but to the maximum level of a battalion, and without attempting territorial occupations. Seeing the narrow defensive behavior assumed by units of the Italian 10th Army, the enemy profited from the initiative that was granted to him, making way for a series of thrusts against all the border places from the sea to Giarabub, on a front of approximately 300 kilometers. The night on the 12 June the modest garrisons of Sidi Omar and the Fort Maddalena (Bir Scegga) were lively engaged and, the morning after, half overrun and half forced to withdraw. On the 14th it was the Fort Capuzzo's turn, whose defenders, approximately 200 men, were overwhelmed. At the same time at Sidi Azeiz the 1st Libyan Regiment, reinforced by two companies of light tanks, at first repulsed

the enemy attack, but subjected to repeated aerial bombardment, also partly from of our own aircraft unaware of location of the troops, was put in remarkable disorder, yes to be forced to withdraw on Bardia to recover and be put back in order.

Given the necessity to resist in some way the enemy activity and to prevent a climate of demoralization being created, among our troops, they were ordered also to execute armed reconnaissance towards the abandoned border positions, by units endowed with functioning small-caliber antitank pieces, even if only the 47mm guns had armor-piercing ammunition. To tell the truth, Gen. Dalmazzo, commander of XXI Army Corps, manifested his own misfortune in the comparison with actions of forces from the towns of Bardia and Tobruk, judging absolutely inadequate the armament available. But, the alternative, line of inaction appeared an unacceptable one to follow. Therefore, at dawn on the 15th a grouping of the *Marmarica* (62nd) Inf. Div. left from Bardia reaching the same morning Fort Capuzzo, that it found -evacuated. On the night on the 16th another grouping, of the 1st Libyan division - constituted from a Libyan battalion, two light tank companies and a motorized battery -left from Gabr Saleh towards Sidi Omar-Fort Capuzzo in order to clean up the area from possible infiltrations. Unfortunately the action did not have a happy outcome: the column, was surprise that morning towards Sidi Omar by enemy armored elements, it endured serious losses ⁽¹⁸⁾ and its remains flowed back to Tobruk. Commander, Col. D'Avanzo, had fallen on the field ⁽¹⁹⁾. The same morning of the 16th took place an English incursion of ten of armored car to the west of Bardia: one our supply convoys directed to Tobruk was destroyed and some officers, among them the commander of the engineers of the 10th Army, captured.

Although the British episodes for the greater part were repulsed, the fact of their persistence anywhere, also in the rear, the participation of enemy aviations in continuous raids or in ground attacks, the first negatives comparisons of our light tanks with simple armored car ⁽²⁰⁾. generated on the 16th of June by the Comando Superiore radioed to the Comando Supremo about the "frustrating situation on the eastern front". In effects, the XXI Army Corps, the most forward, was collecting elements unfavorable to its efficiency: lowering of moral in the 1st *Libyan* division, extreme difficulty in radio connections, most for not working, training unpreparedness of the convoys to react to aerial attacks and to aerial incursions, excessive vulnerability!

of the light tanks, deficiency of antitank arms. Also the deployment left much to be desired. The *Marmarica* (62nd) Inf. Div. was deployed between Bardia and the Fort Capuzzo (Amseat); behind it and slightly toward the west, the *1st Libyan* it was located between Sidi Azeiz and Gabr Saleh; at 120 kilometers further behind, in the zone of *el-Adem*, the *Cirene* (63rd); the 2nd *Libyan* was in route from *Benghazi*. But, half the unit was still on the move, with the order if it can be flown over: it was to be put into effect because of a defect with that type of unit. If in place of the *Marmarica* (62nd) Inf. Div. the *Centauro* (131st) with M 11 tanks, and that instead of the *1st Libyan* and *Cirene* (63rd) had been found *Trento* (102nd) or *Trieste* (101st) Mot. Divs (it would have been very possible, so that it was intentional), evidently the discourse would have been different. He added that, despite generally being in accordance with the stationing -it was difficult, in fact, to make the position -the British, much to often was proceeded by "impressions", attributing to the adversary every possibility, even if with little reason. The evening of the 14th Balbo telegraphed to Badoglio making a report of the combats on the frontier and the loss of the Fort Capuzzo. In that center it indicated "[enemy] forces to the horizon. Many more units than was believed participated in the action of the former famous eastern soldier *Weygand*"⁽²¹⁾.

On the border the northern garrisons had fallen: Fort Capuzzo, Sidi Omar, Bir Sceferzen, Fort Maddalena. As this had occurred revealing the nature of things, given the possibility against the English to quickly realize fast and at the point desired the superiority of forces or vehicles necessary and sufficient at the target and the impossibility from Italian side of tactical communications between the border areas let alone the nonexistence of any reserve mobile element in a position to support them now one hour to the next in order to attend to superficial the hostile actions. It was, in other words, connected to the errors in the advanced dispositions and of small isolated strong points wide intervals with the task of resistance in place. After a week of hostilities there remained the Fortress of Giarabub, whose investment began on the 17th of June. The position of Garn el-Grein (a score of men with two Schwarzlose machine-guns) was evacuated on the 18th, in the second assault, and the garrison withdrew on Giarabub, while that of Uescehet el-Neira (a patrol of Libyans) did not have any possibility to get away. Therefore the 19th of June remained only the large strongpoint of Giarabub. The first enemy attempt came the 19th lead with a group of forty armored vehicles and repelled without difficulty, but until the end of the month the combat were repeated on the peripheral guard posts and culminated

in attempt occurring the 30th of June by armored and motorized units and rendered vain by a counterassault by the defenders and the participation of the Italian Air force.

Considering the course of the things, Balbo had in the meantime established to move personally to Cyrenaica. The evening of the 16 June had to come to Cirene, arranging the proper tactical command. Before leaving he had written Badoglio to communicate having arranged the transfer to the 10th Army of the 55th *Savona* artillery and a light tank battalion; in the meantime he complained the deficiency of motor vehicles, tankers and fuels and emphasized that the new bombers (SM- 79) consequent for lacking in anti-sand intakes were quickly damaged. The dispatch concluded with the entity a over appreciation of the opposing forces: *"the single English Armored division that is in line has about 360 between armored car and medium Tanks"* ⁽²²⁾ and with this "communication" - that revealed a famous controversy -of the decisions taken: *"I want to arrive very soon at the embankment of Sollum, as my first plan for the first hours of hostility, return later to plan an explicit order"* ⁽²³⁾. The following morning Gen. *Giuseppe Tellera*, his chief of general staff, summoned to Tripoli Gen. *Gariboldi* so that he would send to the 10th Army the XXIII Corps (less the two legions with the 2nd Div. (CC.NN. 28 Ottobre), a group of eight 65/17 battery sections from the XX Corps and the 55th *Savona* artillery ⁽²⁴⁾. Balbo was definite to quickly to rearrange the situation. The 18th requested reports of the Gen. *Berti*, commander of the 10th Army, and Gen. *Porro*, commander of the Air Force. The 10th Army had to assume a particularly reactive behavior during the organization of the surprise attack on Sollum (1st Libyan Div.), the Air Force had moved to Cyrenaica the 13th Fighter Group CR-42, the 50th Assault Squadron, reuniting in one aerial brigade the 2nd Fighter Squadron and the 50th Assault, as well as the mass of resources and the logistic organization. Moreover, given the new importance attributed to Cyrenaica, The Intendenza* N. A. receiving orders transferring them to eastern Libya, leaving in *Tripolitania* one Intendenza delegation. Also was decided for the 20th a seaplane attack against Bug Bug and Sidi el-Barrani, a place that the Supermarina had offered to the send of the cruisers *Diaz* and *Da Giussano*, however the enterprise once made and at once reappraised ⁽²⁵⁾. Badoglio and Mussolini were kept current of the picture that was delineating on the Egyptian border, but with different spirits. The first one was prudent: *"It is indispensable that Tobruk is organized as entrenched camp and constitutes a secure base. Provided with material withdrawal*

* Intendenza = or Stewardship is the Italian Army's equivalent to the Quartermaster Corp., but it has some extra duties but they are not relevant here.

N.A. =North Africa

from the rest of the colony. But I repeat Tobruk must absolutely be guaranteed" ⁽²⁶⁾, written on the morning of the 19th. The second approved, it would be, enforced. He not only approved of the shipping for the purpose of *Tobruk* but he wanted to add: *"If in order to strike the English it is necessary to invade Egyptian territory. Indifferent as Egypt is it is not neutral, indeed it is better that it declares war"* and *Badoglio*, in reporting, specified: *"If you have current difficulties with the mean aircraft ratio. Lacking material transport except aircraft via sea route"* ⁽²⁷⁾. Frankly a similar sequence of communications does not seem in line with a clear operating vision. In part the shape of *Mussolini's* thought on the question with the eventual difficulties nearly sound ironic, where his thinking that even two weeks before the *Centauro* had been granted and latter denied for few reasonable reasons and that just on the day war was declaration the *Comando Superiore* had remembered serious deficiencies (is not important, in this work, if estimated for excess or insufficiency) they could not give an overwhelming blow. *Balbo* in fact answered in the tone: *"Caro Badoglio, you being perfectly current of our situation in Eastern Libya and I do not have need to spend words for illustration"* and cited the inferiority of the light tanks on the front to English armored cars with 12.7 cal. machine-guns, suggesting to ask the Germans for one hundred fifty *Panzer* and as many armored cars. But not at all discouraged, indeed hinting about the *Panzer* he retuned to his old idea of an offensive towards the canal: he could at the same time as the development of the German effort against England and that hundred of medium tanks would sure have allowed to reach the most important objective of on the single front where English could be attacked directly *"give directly to the Duce this my letter -he said finally – it is sure that he will obtain this small aid of materials and not of men from an ally"* ⁽²⁸⁾, and then, in the opinion felt by *Gen. Berti*, made a continuation asking for a thousand motor vehicles, hundred tankers trucks, antitank and antiaircraft batteries, radio stations and medium tanks and expressing desire, inasmuch as there was not from the delusion that such material could flow quickly, but to proceed, no sooner then the armistice with France was signed, and briefly before the occupation of Tunisia, that it would have concurred "to take" material from the French necessary in order to face the English ⁽²⁹⁾.

Badoglio answered that the shipment of 70 M11 tank from Italy was imminent, but care of Tunisia was limited to observation, as we know, that the treaty did not foresee the occupation. In the meantime

A directive to Superaereo had circulated: while the C.S.F.A.A.S.* was organizing a land offensive, Superaereo had studied the possibilities and the methods of a massive operation on the base of Alexandria leaving from Sicily and therefore without interference on the aviation of Libya⁽³⁰⁾. In the first period of operations the Libyan Aeronautical Command itself had proposed, with priority one, to attack the enemy air force bases for reducing their efficiency and to facilitate successive Italian action against Alexandria and other important objectives. At least the bulk of the organization of British ground was massed in the Nile valley and the Delta, that is to say in practice beyond the useful range limit of the SM-79. Towards the border the English had a single fully equipped fortified camp to be utilized as a line of departure to reach in the start of the mission. In short, the objectives on which the incursions of the bombers were essentially concentrated Halfaya, Sollum, Bug Bug, Sidi el-Barrani, Marsa Matruh and the British armored or mechanized forces. But the participation against these units had harmful consequences. Given the expanse of their activity of ambushes and surprise attacks (and their successes, that, even if isolated and limited, added together began to weigh) the aviation was called more and more often to operate. Badoglio and Balbo were convinced of being able to achieve appreciable result and positive effects were really obtained, since ten days after beginning an appreciable slowing down in enemy incidence, however the uncharacteristic employment of aerial department units acquired a dimension and an unexpected intensity, about which soon the negative implication appeared: heavy strain of the aircrafts and the crews, impossibility of a minimum of the required maintenance, urgency of continuing operations, employment to the limit or excess regarding to strike the objective. In all- it translated, in the first two weeks of war, in losses equal to 20% of the line, without counting the damages due to the elevated temperatures and the sand, and consequently in the beginning of pressing demands for replacement for aircraft and supplying of replacement parts. That induced Balbo to address a dry observation to the Command of the 10th Army and to the Air Force Command:

"The employment of aviation in the last days completely is mistaken. The aircraft are not sent to attack armored car, if not in large groups of 20. The isolated armored car must be driven off by the columns of the Army".

Move a observer to the East Area Command, as having adhered

* C.S.F.A.A.S = Superior Command Armed Forces North Africa

much easing of the demands of the Army.

Everyone faces his trade offs, if they want that the Aviation, at the moment of the need, efficient" ⁽³¹⁾

It was bring in route to the deployment in accordance with the advance of the XXI Corps: the *Marmarica (62nd)* was deployed to the south of Bardia; the 2nd *Libyan*; was still at Tobruk, it had to assembles themselves at Sidi Azeiz; the 1st *Libyan* collects itself at Gabr Saleh; the *Cirene (63rd)* was in reserve in the area of el-Adem. The movements had to be completed by the 24th or 25th of June, but they lingered beyond that period. While the armistice negotiations with France were being completed. The 25th of June, as soon as the convention was signed at Villa Incisa, Badoglio told the information to Balbo, assuring him the shipment of materials with disembarkation at Benghazi. He anticipated also an operating address.

"When you have the seventy medium tanks you will dominate the situation.

In the mean time is present held that the enemy cannot act with very great forces. From Marsa Matruh to our border there are 220 Km. of desert If your very serious worry is that of water, equally thus, and perhaps in greater measure, is it the worry of the enemy.

And then the English command has demonstrated itself lacking in dash. In the first days they could do much more damage than they have done.

Your main worry now must be that of organization on the ground so as to be certain that any enemy blow may accomplish are successfully refuted.

Reach this situation then you will be able to think of future actions. But always proceed by degrees before to be sure of the house door -then to think to act (.,.) ", ⁽³²⁾

Then he approached Mussolini and he showed him the specific situation after the French collapse: since the only theater of operations became the African, it was necessary to reduce the Po plain and to reinforce the islands and the South. Moreover: the Army General Staff. had to study an offensive from Cyrenaica towards Alexandria and the Air Force General Staff to prepare "to sterilize" Malta and to act on Gibraltar and Alexandria, upgrading the Air Force of the *Aegean*. For the first time *Badoglio* accepted, indeed he made just the plan for an offensive against Egypt, but, according to his character, he meant to proceed to with a gradual organization, a very gradual one. He did not think that Mussolini would have seized the opportunity to press on the accelerator. In the afternoon he convened to report the heads and the chiefs of the General Staff.

There were three subjects: Gibraltar, Malta and the offensive into Egypt ⁽³³⁾. The first two, entrusted to the competence of the Air Force, were planned in a very superficial way: for Gibraltar, with aid from the Spanish in fuel and bombs, it was possible *"to give a good lesson to the English"* (but in order to realize a Pearl Harbor groundwork was needed, means and plans were necessary); for Malta it was necessary to make *"a very nourished action, so that English understand that, its like a bridge, she cannot cross"*. All here. He would say himself lacked even the simple perception of reality and the ability "knock out" one or the other base, but still more serious it is that neither Pricolo nor Cavagnari, and not even Roatta who replaced Graziani, raised the problem in depth of Malta. Perhaps the war was thought to be in its preverbal finished, did not make more enemy in Tunisia seeing the issue from another point of view. The conviction was however disputable that Malta could be rendered with a few or many incursions, when the episode of Dunkque must have shown the limits of a strongly and trained air force, limits not believed in by Goering. To find that when Pricolo asked if he could *"add"* Alexandria to the previous objectives, Badoglio, as soon as a day before had ordered the G.S.R. Air Force. to study the action, he was cut short: *"Alexandria will comes according to time"*. The main argument of the meeting was Libya, whose more important aspect was translated in the intention of passed from the craving of the Supreme Command and to those of the General Staffs of the Armed Forces, that it will happen on the date 4 July. This place: Balbo -still had -*"to close the doors of house"* and Roatta to face the topic of the offensive towards the canal. And to this point Badoglio made an meaningful observation:

"It may be the case that the situation became serious for Britain in Egypt and we would be convenient make a decisive stake, which would give the Duce that element of consistency for the claims towards Egypt"

The strategic conception was the recurrent reason of all: absolute defensive, but an enemy crisis. But it is difficult, very difficult to think to gain a single war trusting in the collapse of the enemy, for which would be due to causes all extraneous to our pressure. In any case, for Badoglio was still a matter eventuality deal with. The following morning it all changed: Mussolini intended *"to move very soon into action against England"* ⁽³⁴⁾ and Badoglio wrote to Balbo

"because the time seem to be running out and we could be obliged to move as soon as possible eastward, if we do not want to remain at the conclusion of the peace with empty hands".

According to the intonation of Marras from Berlin, the preparations for the invasion of Great Britain seemed most advanced, much talk about beginning of the operation in the successive week. Therefore was the departure of four destroyers with reinforcements for Tobruk and many steamships with various materials. For the 5th or 6th of July was foreseen as the arrival at Benghazi of the promised 70 M11 tanks *"that are magnificent"*. Also a suggestion on the logistics, rather original: it was to study supplying from Cyrenaica during the advance towards the east with civil aircraft, which they would be landed to keep the columns in motion. The conclusion of the letter assumed an urging tone: *"I am here to the ribs of all in order to hurry as much as I can the shipment of more materials to Libya. You put wings on the Feet of all (...). The troops that you have at the front are not accustomed to the warmth of the desert. You surely will have some arrangement"*. He followed with the real explanation of the urgency: *"I have written you often over how, because the Duce is clamping at the bit and thinks we must get moving"* ⁽³⁵⁾.

The 28th, then, specified as the target date of the offensive as to be completed before the 15th of July. That same day, at 17:40, the aircraft of Balbo, was hit by our antiaircraft fire, fell in flames while he was returning to Tobruk after a small enemy air raid ⁽³⁶⁾.

It is not said that the things would have changed a lot if the mortal incident had not been taken place, however it can be presumed that the personality of Balbo would have weighed predominantly on the decisions and the provisions to be taken in North Africa. When the news reached Rome, Badoglio hinted to Mussolini the name of the man. Graziani, chief of general staff of the R. Esercito. Odd the designation given the assignment from this quarters ⁽³⁷⁾, strange the approval of Mussolini, stranger still that the new Commander in Chief of Libya was keep the responsibility of Chief of the General Staff of the Army instead of abdicating it. And the sense of unpleasant astonishment is undeniable with which Graziani received knowledge of the decision. Informed by telephone, around 10 am of the 29th of June, by Badoglio, demanded a meeting for the orders, but the chief of General Staff, always by telephone, limited himself to the answer that he would find around the new Command the sent guidelines to Balbo, and Mussolini, would himself by telephone, communicate *"Not to have another by adding how I personally told Badoglio"* ⁽³⁸⁾. Nevertheless in Rome the recent picture, was

hopeful, clearly the German intentions, they seemed resolute; it was believed to establish connection in time between theirs and the offensive towards Alexandria and the channel and one that agreed to pass the responsibility of the North Africa theater of operations to Superesercito, the main decisions which -taken on orders of Badoglio or Mussolini -they had to be sent to Cirene for the company of the titular Chief of the General Staff.

Always on the topic of departure directives, finally, he can add that it did not persuade him to renounce the chief position of Graziani in a briefing, thereafter, he arrived at the Castel Benito airport in the early afternoon of the 30th, he went at once to Tripoli, the Comando Superiore Command Center, and in next evening he continued to Benghazi, reaching the Cirene that day.

The 2nd of July, was the first contact between the new ranking commander and his chief of the general staff, beginning at the operating phase that had to be completed by the 16th of September at Sidi el-Barrani. It is not easy to break down this period into distinguished actions, being characterized by a succession of decisions and afterthoughts, impasse and concessions. Just a short sequence is adequate in order to give an idea of the "intelligent discipline" existing to high level. The 3rd of July Mussolini had established as the beginning of a better not defined offensive to begin on the 15th of the same month; the 12th Graziani stated he was ready to move but only to Sollum; the 14th Mussolini gave *carte blanc* for the beginning of the offensive provided that it went beyond Sollum; the 15th Graziani communicated he had to suspend the action, but he supported the Sollum objective; the 15th Mussolini concurred the move until to Sollum with date establish by the same chief commander; the 19th Graziani asserted that by now he did not arrange more then to halt at Sollum but that, in order to proceed in depth, he need more time and freedom of action; the 20th Badoglio approved of; the 29th Graziani declared that an offensive until Marsa Matruh was considered "prohibitive"; at least at this time; on 5 August Graziani, was summoned to Rome by Mussolini, in the presence Badoglio, he repeated the impracticability of an offensive into Egypt and, in conclusion, he accepted a push on Sollum, with Sidi el-Barrani as the eventual objective; the 19th Mussolini urged Graziani to move as soon as the invasion of Great Britain begun: no territorial objective, it was enough to attack; at the same time Graziani reported to Mussolini the outcome of a high level meeting: they seem collectively contrary to whichever offensive action; although for a limited arm length; but, as soon as he received the dispatch from Mussolini he hurried to assure that he would have reached Sollum; the 29th Badoglio communicated

an order from Mussolini, than the beginning of the operation had to be between the 8th and the 10th September; the 2nd of September Graziani objected to being forced to the limit just to occupy of the outlets of Sollum and Halfaya; the 5th of September Graziani reported of being able to only move on the first of October; the same day Mussolini ordered the beginning of the attack on Sidi el-Barrani for the 9th of September.

Before expressing judgment, I will convene to cover step by step the developments of the circumstances in order to know the alleged reasons from both sides to support their respective convictions, however now finally it seems permissible to assert that the firmness lacking in the commander responsible for the operations in North Africa to introduce at once their own appraisal of local operating problem and to support the consequent solution with coherence and continuity, ready to ask an exemption if disagreement about accomplish with the Comando Supremo?

The new supreme commander quickly had one surprise: the dispatch of 28 June with which Badoglio ordered Balbo to: "*You make all ready for the day of the 15th*", he did not know anything, and the next day, 3 July, received the first directive addressed to him:

"Duce orders me of communicate to you that the it is of vital interest for Italy that you are to be ready to deliver an offensive for the day of the fifteenth, to be simultaneous with German actions. You must count essentially on materials existing in the colony. Telegraph for absolutely indispensable materials that we will send by convoy together medium tanks. You know our availabilities and our difficulties. You exceeded them in Somalia under the greatest difficulties -you will exceed now. God willing" ⁽³⁹⁾.

Therefore: he had to attack the 15th as on that day, in a grand manner, would have attacked the Germans; he had to consider how much was in Libya, well-known as inadequate, in part the medium tanks and the absolutely indispensable materials; he knew the difficulties of the Comando Supremo and to them he had nothing to object; the Comando Supremo knew his difficulties but knew that he, Graziani, would have to exceeded them⁶. Therefore he had to assure that he would exceed those difficulties in ten days and that on the 15th he would have to attack. It is not the case to criticize much because orders of this type often circulate in war, in all armies. Sure, but, the addressee gains more irritation than incentive. Graziani began with to take account of the situation. In Tripolitania the 5th Army under Gen. Garibaldi had seven divisions, grouped in the X and XX Corps.

Evidently it could supply many units for the Egyptian front, but it had yielded all the motor vehicles therefore becoming paralyzed, the very intervening 1800 kilometers between Tripoli and Bardia and to consider the very to dangerous coastal navigation up to Benghazi, even if Adm. Brivonesi held specifically that transport from Tripoli to Benghazi or Tobruk was feasible and with lesser risks through the Mediterranean. In Cyrenaica the 10th Army under Gen. Berti was constituted from seven others divisions: three infantry, two Libyans and two black shirts (militia), framed into three small army corps: XXI, XXII and XXIII. In defense of the communication about the two -blocking forces would be assured by several Libyan battalions, recovering from the initial alignment or of new formations.

For Graziani in truth he had at once asked for information on the offensive plans of Balbo towards Egypt, but the chief of general staff, Gen. Tellera, had alleged that a clear one did not exist true and proper plan: *"it had only been a collection of ideas that Marshal Balbo nourished, however never specified exactly. In any case, according to Tellera, -not feasible for lack of adequate means"*⁽⁴⁰⁾. Of this front (the rather vague answer was, they were assembling reports of the main subordinate commanders. At the meeting, held on 4 July, Gen. Berti asserted that, also being in acquaintance with the ideas or intentions of an offensive character from Balbo, he had not ever received orders with regard to or communications circa the date of realization. Also this answer could not be considered satisfactory, but it was fundamentally accurate. Balbo always had been limited to express personal convictions not shared by direct subordinates, without making a prepared plan, also because, for precisely on his insistence, in October 1938 Pariani had entrusted to Soddu, the old sub chief of the General Staff of the Army for operations, the study of the attack possibilities on Egypt. The affirmative conclusions, had not convinced Badoglio when he give it back to the Commander of the body of the General Staff ordering the former re-examination the problem under every point of view and the re-examination had just fallen into the hands of Graziani, from 3 November 1939 replaced by Pariani. Graziani, therefore, was well up to date on the nature of the problem and similar operation had been convinced a failure; moreover on 24 November they had spoken openly with Balbo, taking advantage of his arrival in Rome for this last. It seems that Balbo's meeting was classified as such *"to reveal at an opportune moment the relative plan, which he meant keep secret and was studying that for years"*⁽⁴¹⁾, however Graziani had finally sent a messenger for

a plan that less than exceptionally favorable events, could not be thought to instantiate an offensive, also leaving Balbo the authority to study a plan, different from the previous one as much as disapproved by Badoglio, and give its details to the General Staff.

In as much as Mussolini had not established any objective scope either, Graziani determined to make the possible one in relation to the state of the forces and means and by the nature of the theater of operations *"without that is to promise now of the possibilities"* ⁽⁴²⁾. The forces were constituted, as we know, from the 10th Army plus one division (the Sirte) [61st], to transport via sea from Tripolitania in order to watch over the Cyrenaican *gebel* and to give assurance to the right flank of the army, and constituting a grouping of Libyan battalions; all the means were that available locally that Gen. D'Aponte, chief superintendent, carrying them in flight to Rome, he would be successful to meeting the demands already introduced by Balbo; the terrain offered only an coastal direction, to south of which desert alone existed, without possibility of maneuver, also because an attack from Giarabub for Siwa on one of the guiding trails leading to Sidi el-Barrani, Marsa Matruh and Gerawla, would have had need a system for which the time lacked. After all, on 15 July he could conduct an advance with foot troops on Sollum; subsequently, in relation to the attitude of the enemy and put into effect further organization, would have consolidated the possession of Sollum and proceeded beyond. On this bases he attended the meeting of the 4th had realize the studies. A note made by Graziani deserves review in his hope that within half a month the tanks demanded from Italy to arrive, in all or part, which would have made maneuvering attack from the motorized units realizable. Berti asked then, of how many units of the sort was expected to be able to arrange, but Graziani was rather generic: all it depended on the yield of the requisition from the motherland, therefore it was necessary that the 10th Army to examine *"the sole possibilities of attack based on the various logically permissible situations"*.

Premised that, probably, speaking about "maneuvering attack" he meant to *refer* then also to the exploitation of the events, seems that three arguments would have deserved very more careful consideration: the composition of the army corps, very frail, inhomogeneous; the more unfavorable circumstance for the *motor* vehicles, that is the availability at the time, because determining for the goals of the logistic consummations feeding the effort, of any entity was; finally, the consistency and the presumed understandings of the enemy. The first only in part could

The first only in part could be considered an issue inside the army: there was too much to revise; the second was put on the carpet on 6 July, when the chief of general staff of the 10th Army (Gen, Giuliano) introduced to the Comando Superiore demonstrating that with how much existed, and given the potential of the ports of Tobruk and Bardia, *twenty-two days* were necessary in order to complete the stockpile of the materials being necessary; the third part, strangely, does not turn out having been formed as a object of argument, According to the historical diary of the Comando Superiore the enemy situation was the following: in the area of Sollum-Halfaya-Sidi Omar, that is to say along the frontier, 7th and 11th Hussars and the I battalion of the *King's Royal Rifle Corps* (I/KRRC); covering them Command of the 4th Armored Brigade with the 8th Hussars; in the area of Bug Bug, the Command of the 7th Armored Brigade with I and VI *Royal Tanks*, the II *Rifle Brigade*, the I *Cheshire Regiment* and the II *Scots Guards*, in the area of Sidi el Barrani the Command 7th Arm. Div, and the support group with the I *Northumberland* and II *Highland Light infantry*; more rearward the 4th Indian Div, The entity of the garrison of Marsa Matruh was not known, it was presumed a division was between Marsa Matruh and El Daba and two or three others divisions in the delta, Substantially the reconstruction was adherent to the reality, but the difficulty regarding appreciation of the operating ability of the English units: cautiously considering the worse case, these were estimated next to the cadet, while in effects sensitive differences sometimes existed, however well masked by the efficiency and mobility of the units, as well as from their noted employment, What was the operating level of the enemy, some of them had not been drawn deductions: forces on one side were afraid of incursions, from the other was considering an attack a defensive arrangement, Generally they were presuming the lost time a courtesy for the English but, the efficiency of the 10th Army, asked time to confer movement and penetration ability, above all.

In the meantime in Rome, the continuation of the armistice with France, had been made the objective of the political-military situation, The morning of 2 July, on the basis of a meeting held with Badoglio on 25 June. Soddu presented to Mussolini a memorandum on the activity of the army, Rating that the operating activity of them was markedly reduced, it was necessary adjust the structure, the force and the equipment, for the duel purpose of favoring the resumption of the economic-social activities, above all agriculture, and to avoid to the state treasury burdens not absolutely indispensable. Therefore proposed series of provisions: the gradual return to the depots of a good part of the mobilized units to

Therefore proposed a series of provisions: the gradual return home a good part of the units gathered on the western frontier, with precedence for those located to the south of Rome; the reduction of the armed forces to a million men, to put into effect with dispatch in limitless license of oldest; the abolition Commands of the Army groups and starting with Commands being of secondary necessity; the reduction to nuclei of some services; the immediate demobilization of all party troops and finally the concession of agricultural licenses to the force that would remain under arms. Of course, Libya and Egypt were excluded from the provisions. The frontier guard and the mountain divisions, the army of the Po, the army corps with the western and eastern frontiers, the troops of the islands and Albania had reduction to 75% of the war staff. It was to be a matter of measures of an administrative character, however, concerning them also the order of the major units, it needs to be noted the proposal lacked a offer to bring to 100% in personnel and equipment the Armored Corps of the Army (*Ariete* and *Littorio* Arm. Divs. and, *Trento* and, *Trieste* Mot. Divs.) and to dispatch them to Africa, but at regimental scale. In the afternoon Badoglio reconvened the chiefs of the general staff. In the short report -twenty-five minutes -information demands of Malta, Gibraltar and Alexandria, but only under the aspect of the aerial offense. Pricolo reported the absence or nearly of aircraft at Malta, of the Spanish refusal to facilitate the incursions on Gibraltar, of the attack possibilities on Alexandria from the Aegean. Badoglio agreed and passed to the Army. No concern for the Yugoslavian frontier and not even for the islands. It was necessary to make of all so that the medium trucks destined for Libya arrived at Benghazi, "*therefore the Navy to escort the convoy with all the ships of the fleet*" and Pricolo was the person in charge to collaborate the aerial reconnaissance and with the bombing from the Sicilian, Puglia and also Libyan bases ⁽⁴³⁾.

Not a word on an argument that the following day would have constituted an article of a message of particular worth of Graziani, that he had as soon as replaced Balbo in the burden as Comandante Superiore of the Armed Forces of North Africa. On 3 July, after a short talk with Mussolini, Badoglio communicated to Graziani that it was "*of vital interest for Italy*" he is ready to deliver an offensive for the 15th, in concurrence with the foreseen German attack on England ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

In reality only one day before the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) had announced that according to Hitler the invasion of Great Britain was possible provided aerial supremacy and some realized achieving it was another thing, but the date still had not been fixed and the planners had to keep that in mind, for the moment,

was only be a matter of a plan. Therefore "*the vital interest*" of Italy to be ready for the 15th was founded on the imagination. In the mean time Roatta had meet in Rome on the 4th and 5th with Gen. D'Aponte, superintendent superior for N.A., to which he had shown the shipment for Badoglio, in order to realize requirements, against new possibility and planned deliveries. On basis of previous agreements⁽⁴⁵⁾ the first shipment was foreseen for 6 July and was concerning the 4th Infantry Tank with 72 M 11 tanks, the IX Tank battalion armed with them, smaller units and various material; the second sent had to concern two heavy truck companies and one light and 200 other motor vehicles; for successive shipments the advanced intent had to introduce of turn in time order of precedence and time of shipment. Until then the limited transports for the Libya had been carried out with warships, naval destroyer and submarines, but on the 25 June when two motor-ships had sailed. The principle plans for the constitution of natural convoys had been compiled in times of peace, even if nobody had foreseen the intensity of the supply that the war vicissitudes rendered necessary, but the urgency of the transports and especially the fear to offer to the enemy a too much vulnerable target made to set aside that solution.

The ascertainment that Malta was practically inoperative as an air force base and of the submarines -they were until November 1940 -it induced to change system, naturally with opportune measures of safety. The evening of the 6 July departed from Naples the first true convoy, a steamship and four motor-ships, escorted by the 14th torpedo boats squadron. At dawn the next morning Supermarina had news of Force H (Adm. Somerville) from Gibraltar (the aircraft carriers *Ark Royal*, the battle cruiser *Hood*, two battleships, three light cruisers and ten naval destroyer) had taken to the sea, and immediately it ordered the sortie of the 1st Fleet (Adm. Campioni) and of 2nd Fleet (Adm. Paladini), that is the entire fleet: two battleships, six heavy cruisers, twelve light cruisers, thirty-two naval destroyer and six torpedo boats, and at the same time decided reinforce of the formation of the submarines in the eastern Mediterranean. The issue made more complex when, in the night of the 8th, a submarine sighted the Mediterranean Fleet (Adm. Cunningham), having sailed from Alexandria with the aircraft carriers *Eagle*, three battleships, five cruisers and seventeen destroyers. Force H, the whose task (an aerial attack on Cagliari) was an diversion, when it carne faced from air force of the Sardinia with such violence and decision that the Adm. Somerville thought that the danger of damages for the *Ark Royal*

he was by far beyond any advantages that could be gained from the operation on Cagliari, therefore did not exceed waters of the Balearic. The second formation - meant to escort two convoys from Malta to Alexandria -continued instead towards the central Mediterranean. Given the tasks, the routes and the times, the Italian convoy by now reached Benghazi without difficulty on the evening of the 8th. But by now Campioni and Cunningham knew the others presence to the east of Malta. Both accepted a test of force for the 9th: Campioni on orders of the Supermarina, Cunningham of his own decision. This resulted the battle of Punta Stilo.

On 11 July Mussolini circulated the new strategic directives. A good look at it, he was dealing more with a situation by relative concise remarks: for the Egyptian Front, only one remaining, the general governor of Libya had received "*precise directives regarding the conduct to follow*" therefore was not remaining them send to the material necessary for the performance of the task; the fleet had to maintain and to develop still more the service of discovery at sea to be in a position to intervene "*at the opportune moment*"; the air force, they by now had predominance in the Mediterranean, had to strike in mass three objectives, that is to say Malta, Alexandria and the enemy fleet at sea. He closed calling for decision and audacity ⁽⁴⁶⁾. As is seen it cannot be asserted that these directives were particularly illuminating on the developments that the Duce meant to give to the war, but, reporting on the withdraw of the greater part of the Army of the Po in the plain, contained one phrase of uncertain and worrisome meaning: "*where it will be measures to promptly be directed and be concentrated as well as towards the north as towards the east, according to the required demands*". Already a week before the Comando Supremo had noted the possibility that not far expiration of themselves were producing complications towards Yugoslavia, to the point to order to the General Staff of the Army to move to the eastern border an army corps and the General Staff of the Air force holding ready the fields of the Veneto in order to receive at the proper time masses of aircraft ⁽⁴⁷⁾, and Ciano the 7th in Berlin had confirmed to Hitler -by expressed assignment of Mussolini the offer of troops (also ten divisions) and also of aircraft (thirty squadrons). Here, therefore, the directions east and north. If also, at least for the moment, such guidelines did not have repercussions on the operations in Africa, are worth the pain of remark, also knowing that Graziani, already like Balbo, found difficulty to organize an offensive towards Egypt, also knowing that in order to

satisfy minimum requirements in extent, of the 10th Army Roatta he was forced to plunder the major units in Italy ⁽⁴⁸⁾, were his belief that new initiatives would have entails the desperate search for the missing material usually in order to partially assemble other major units. The declaration, therefore, of every intention to send to Africa half of all the materials marked as indispensable was surely the best possible one, intention, but it also constituted a dangerous weakness because it gave confidence in the acceptance of the demands, after the 1073/op. telegram of 3 July from Badoglio informing them to count *"essentially on existing material in colony"*. Moreover, the directives in question were withdrawn after two days, without any explanation; perhaps for the untimely hint to the north and the east.

On 12 July, after a ten of days of organizational work, Graziani communicated to Badoglio that within forty-eight hours he would have begun the movement beyond the border for the occupation of Sollum. But, he was cautious. After having to explained that the means of transport available did not allow him *"further immediate outreach"*, he specified it was his intention to remove enemy pressure from the frontier. Advancing subsequently would have to be measured by the further possibilities so because the M 11 tanks would reach Tobruk the next day and therefore they would be entering the line on the 14th, that is the immediate eve of operations ⁽⁴⁹⁾. Indeed, holding account of just such circumstance, he wished conformation of the established date ⁽⁵⁰⁾. He could very well have decided, or at least, have proposed a delay of a day or two, inasmuch as the approved reason of the invasion of England has not manifested. It is a fact that had to question raised by the immediate answer from Badoglio, was in truth very little compatible with the rhetorical peremptoriness with which he had indicated the date of 15 July: *"The beginning date has been indicated to me on the whole suitable. You will begin operations when you think opportune. In conclusion you have complete freedom of action"* ⁽⁵¹⁾. It not that the new dispatch on the 14th provided better illumination, at least for clarifying, the situation. Badoglio seemed to have assumed an indifference attitude; who ventilated initiatives in his head was Mussolini:

"Duce authorizes to you to delay said operation until to when you have all the means that will allow you to carry out a maneuver of immense radius and depth so as to achieve consequences of remarkable importance.

To conquer Sollum and then to stop is not a profitable maneuver and therefore not effective.

I will signal you with accuracy when you will receive the materials agreed on between your superintendent and Superesercito. Signal Receipt. Badoglio" ⁽⁵²⁾.

After all, it was necessary to achieve a result of "*remarkable importance*", but it was not said if that was territorial or operational; to arrive there Superesercito would have to send the agreed materials and only then the offensive would have been launch. Graziani could declare himself satisfied because in practice he received *carde blanc*. He did not know it, but the main reason resided in the German indecision via the invasion of the English island ⁽⁵³⁾. He answered the Comando Supremo with an explanatory telegram with reasons for which the occupation of Sollum was prefixed until the Halfaya Wadi: to deny to the enemy a base from which his "daily bothersome attacks" departed; to reject the British pressure on Sidi el-Barrani, that is by a hundred kilometers to the east, and to acquire liberty of long movement in such a way the Ft. Capuzzo-Ft. Maddalena Giarabub track in order to constitute in this last location the base for the occupation of Siwa and possession of like bases for the foreseen future Sollum and Siwa offensive, the former by a frontal attack on Sidi el-Barrani and Marsa Matruh, the latter by a flanking movement from the south. There was also the psychological reason to raise the moral of the 10th Army, that at the beginning of the campaign surely had not reached to stars. The telegram did not discuss or proposed something. It was limited to explain and to conclude: "*I wait for the hour of action*" ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

To Rome it was interpreted as an implicit and respectful insistence on the opportunity to realize at once the preparations -not difficult -to understand improving the conditions for launching the offensive established since the observations was valid, Mussolini accepted the Sollum operation, but Badoglio, in reporting that "*nearly all*" of the demanded material would be disembarked at Benghazi on the 27th, made the calculation of the time and thought that a week was more than sufficient in order to unload said material with good work.

"Therefore -he continued -in my judgment you could be in a position to deliver the attack with a strategic objective between the third and fourth of August. There (...) remains only to decide which time period is convenient to intercede between new created base of Sollum and beginning operations of wider scope. The Duce (...) approves of that you do the preliminary operation on the day that you will choose (...)" ⁽⁵⁵⁾

It was not very clear. If he gave for compensate against the 3rd or 4th of August

was the time in order to advance on the strategic objective, that direction was having affirmed as "*remaining to decide*" which time had to pass between the occupation of Sollum and the following offensive? Perhaps the "*that piece*" was for "*left for my desecration*". In any case the operation of wide scope still remained a vague one. Now, inasmuch as the task to destroy an armored division could not be assigned to infantry divisions on foot, evidently it did not remain to agree that said task with a clear territorial objective meaning, at least a tactical one if not just a strategic one. Why therefore not determine them openly? Some days after the arrival at Cirene a request: it was the desire of Mussolini that the advance on Sollum was not delayed beyond the 22nd because of the concomitance of a violent offensive against Somaliland that would have been delivered from the Viceroy in East Africa. The reply of Graziani was so annoyed that he had to allow intercessions Commander and the Comando Supremo:

"It is not possible, I say not, to conform them to your 1310/op. and, 1131/op. I have by now set up some plans in relation to the more wide ranging operation. Being here for two days in order to personally control and to organization and collect means. I will be in Tripoli today in order to examine same breaking all surviving resistance and inertias, intending hereby to give new life to anything substantial and downright lucrative. That relative freedom of action is necessary therefore clearly time necessary for me and that already you have granted me with your previous one".
(56)

Badoglio answered in the first person and extremely conciliating way:

"I had not badly intended to say to you to get moving, not even limiting your freedom of action. I have expressed to you the opinion of Duce and my hope for the convenience to harmonize actions of various fields. You are completely free to act in way and in the agreed upon time.

Will you concur with me in the necessity of attaching great importance to information" ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

He thinks himself correct to express some reservations on the relationship between Comando Supremo and the Commander in Chief of Libya. It had looked like Graziani had been urgently sent to Africa, without even a talk that taking place to put to the fire the simple hypothesis of job. After more than three weeks, to Rome the operations on the only remaining front, for more after the command of the Superesercito,

was being hurried, to approved of or to criticize on the basis of the moods of Mussolini -that he meant to lead the war as the solo political plan and, more precisely, on the basis of how much it succeeded in matching the German intentions in comparison with Great Britain -and remaining after all to obscure his of the real intentions about Graziani.

At Cirene, where a atmosphere of distrust existed vis-à-vis an attack in force on Egypt, it was planned slowly but in secret that was nearly in isolation, in formal homage to the directives of the Comando Supremo, oscillated between the dry order to attack and the maximum indulgence. They were therefore creating worse psychological conditions for a harmony of effort and attempts, as well as most necessary in much of the fight in the Mediterranean, that one in North Africa and that one in East Africa by now were moving themselves towards almost complete independence of the theaters of operations and unfortunately, in the Mediterranean basin, also between the several Armed Forces. It could not referred to as "*convenience to harmonize actions in various fields*". The harmonization, a necessity and not a convenience, exists: only as vague aspiration goes. At Punta Stilo the disagreeable consequences of the lack of care taken for the cooperation between Navy and Air Force had been looked at and one of very complete mutual understanding of the common problems.

Graziani had labored and when he received the message from Badoglio felt the need of giving a panorama of the situation. He sent, therefore, a memorandum concerning the new picture of the battle, the operating directives, the air defense, the unburdening of Tripolitania and the re-supply via sea⁽⁵⁸⁾. The 10th Army he explained -was now constituted from the *Cirene* [63rd], *Marmarica* [62nd] and *Catanzaro* [64th] *Inf Divs.*, from the 23 *Marzo* and 3 *Gennaio CC.NN. Divs.* and from a M11 tank battalion. Remaining under the direct command of the Comando Superiore the group of Libyan divisions (Gen. Gallina), the southern oases grouping (Gen. Maletti)⁽⁵⁹⁾, the *Sirte Inf Div.* [61st], the 4th Infantry Tank Regiment (less a battalion) and a mobile artillery regiment. More than a reordering, in truth, he would have been said in a moment what was expected: could not otherwise characterize the ordering of an army down to five divisions. To find that the Libyan divisions group had been prepared in the attempt to obtain a homogenous training level between those units, but, also being to the level of an Army Corp., some of them did not possess the structure, lacking Command, supports and services, and could be decentralized in all or part throughout the 10th Army. Also the logistical field was being prepared and modified: the matter of a delegation

of the Intendenza to the army that, like the 5th, was not provided with its own Intendenza.

"The 10th Army -Graziani wrote -is all confined to the frontier with his five organic divisions. To support them are the two Libyan divisions. The two fortresses of Tobruk and Port Bardia in full efficiency. The communications between them controlled by me. Giarabub adequately Garrisoned, is clearly under control, to wide scope, against the mobile forces of the enemy".

Apart from the alleged efficiency of Tobruk and Bardia, on which for some months Graziani himself will be shown various warnings, and despite some deficiencies of means put in due emphasis, the first of all air defense and that of the principle coastal bases, the picture appeared generically acceptable, much more he was concluding with the proposal to repatriate a portion of the 60,000 men of 5th the Army, as two divisions appeared sufficient in Tripolitania, and a good part of thousands of workers used for work on the defensives of western Libya. On these two ideas, dictated by the presumed "logistical benefit" that would be derived, are difficult to agree. For the troops, premised that the divisions in Cyrenaica were not at all at 100% of the wartime personnel, it was not looked at because they could not be employed in place of the militia divisions or used like a well trained reserve units, which approve the supplying of overseas personnel could not be said regulated from precise dispositions and that the total losses numbered more than 2,000 men, of which a hundred were officers. For the civilian workers, it seemed that their transfer to Cyrenaica was translated as "*aggravation of the logistics*", but it is correct to nourish doubts in the purpose. The report of Graziani had two personal replies. One from Mussolini:

"Chief of General Staff has delivered and has read with great attention your report to me on situation on the east front, a situation that I consider satisfactory. Job preparation is well set up. I foretell myself and are sure that after having been for some weeks the anvil it will be possible soon become the hammer, a hammer grasped in yours firm hands will give the resolute blows to the enemy". ⁽⁶⁰⁾

The other; from Badoglio, it announced the departure of a convoy of twelve steamships the morning of the 31st that would arrived at Tripoli, by where

where part of it would be moved to Benghazi. And he specified also:

"About execution of the operation, the Duce leaves you completely free to do what you want. The Duce had according to time put the operation on Sollum essentially for your relative consideration to the necessity raising the moral of the troops and the populations. But after your telegram he said to me to telegraph you that he is leaving you absolutely free to do as you wanted. And I am very content (...)"⁽⁶¹⁾

At this point Graziani thought it opportune to put the papers on the table. In a letter of reply he declared the precise framework of his intentions in an unambiguous manner and that *"in this season a similar operation cannot not be considered prohibitive"* given the natural atmosphere in which he would have to act. The prohibitive factors were more than one: the period of maximum heat, extreme scarcity of water resources, only director of advancing between the sea and the desert, impossibility to maneuver in the strategic field and strong limitations in the tactical one, deficiency of tankers and water for the road haulage of the imposing mass of the nation. Therefore, with his warning, the operation could be carried out - also always introducing serious difficulties - the length of the warm season, that is to say towards the end of October. He did not make note of the enemy forces that could have on the front after three months, but he was said disposed to go to Rome in order to clear the issue in person⁽⁶²⁾. Badoglio summarize "the latter" in a note, that he presented to Mussolini without comments⁽⁶³⁾, and Mussolini ordered a meeting with Graziani for 5 August.

To Rome the panorama was not appealing, in truth, downright black. Already on 7 July the operations section of the General Staff of the Army had introduced a principle study on the possibilities of an offensive against Egypt. Modernizing the enemy forces, collected in a memorandum on 3 August. British major units now known present numbered to a total of armored division and four of infantry for 65,000 men, of which 7-8,000 to protect the canal. It was from checking the news that was flowing in the region of the Delta forces equivalents to approximately three divisions from Palestine. In compensation, the troops Egyptians (40.000 men) could be neglected, statistics their insufficient consistency and the improbability of locating them on the front. That premising and considered the characteristics of the Egyptian western desert was considered

not possible for the British Command to concentrate the mass of its forces in proximity of the Libyan frontier or the area of Marsa Matruh. For converse it was probable that, even during the Italian offensive, the staggering of the units was maintained with an advanced group (the 7th Arm. Div., the 6th Inf. Div. and 4th Indian Div.) in the area of Sollum-Sidi el Barrani, with a strong nucleus at Siwa; a second group, with a maximum of two-three divisions in the area of Marsa Matruh-el Daba; the remaining troops in the area of Alexandria-Cairo. As a result of that, with the arrival of the shipment of materials in route, the 10th Army and the logistic system of Cyrenaica was considered to meet the requirements connected with the offensive into Egypt. It would remained defective the territorial air defense, but for this disadvantage there was no remedy.

Among the conditions for realizing the success of the operation was of the greatest interest the assembly of the Air Force, of the Navy and the Empire. The R. Air Force had to attend to the mass of aircraft in order to prevent their wear out and damage the enemy forces, especially those aerial and naval, thereafter to cooperate with the land attack with continuity and *"maintain in degree, among other things, to carry out aerial supply and air transport of men and materials"*. The R. Marina, possibly, had to contrast eventual enemy naval attacks, protect the exposed sea flank of the land columns, to cooperate in the eventual battles in the areas of Marsa Matruh and Alexandria, ready to carry out also to maintain transports of the units, water, fuels and various materials and in amounts to eventually realize the invasion. The Comando Superiore of the Armed Forces of the Empire had to start actions in the direction of Khartum and Port Sudan in order to fix and to possibly attract to those regions British air and land forces. This was the picture to which Mussolini became acquainted with and it, probably, formed the basis of his convictions. Also being rational, he found only partial truth in of the correspondence the operating ability to the divisions of the 10th army, of the organization of the Intendenza, the competition of the other Armed Forces and the concurrence of the effort from East Africa.

Some confusion existed with the Comando Supremo: the resulting sea and air activity did not appear very substantial. In July the goals he had stated, all together, had been carried out only four bombings of the base of Alexandria -whose port had received damage from six bombs -with a launch hardly twenty tons of bombs. It could not be just said that

up to now the action had been lead with vigor, in fact the consequences were very mild and deadly inadequate to the importance of the objective. Moreover the high level bombing carried out at Punta Stilo clearly had not impressed the enemy. On the other point of enormous importance, it is worth to saying the channel of Sicily; it was necessary to admit that the distance between the Sicilian coast and those Africans and the length of the distance that was under the directed Italian control was such that a boat could not have escaped notice of the maritime reconnaissance and as any ship sighted could be reached by our naval units and, in any case, attacked without stopping during the diurnal hours from our air force! In order to obtain some result, above all in view of the offensive into Egypt, a greater concentration was evidently necessary and more effective coordination of their efforts. Therefore: intensification of the bombing of Malta, intensification of the bombing of Alexandria, increase of the control on the channel of Sicily increasing the effectiveness of the devices of obstruction (mine fields). The operations section of the Comando Supremo subjected the issue to the attention of Badoglio, who annotated it:

"On the coordination of operations in N. A. I had already thought when the Supermarina had made ready for the first half of August her two 35 thousand tonners and the three modernized. Therefore such a naval group should allow them to set up a naval battle that departing from the ports of the Cyrenaica versus Alexandria.

Our position it was obviously necessity to coordinate land actions and naval action and in more harmonizing the aerial actions with the two fields.

But Admiral Campioni, while he assured me that the *Littorio's* crew is ready at 70 percent, he has to be excluded for defects of the guns the employment of the *Vittorio Veneto* and for deficiency of training of the crew the *Duilio*.

To ourselves remaining therefore the actual state -that is with three battleships, of which, one modern [and] others two inferior, against 4 English battleships. Under this condition it would not be prudent to face a battle to far away from the Italian naval bases.

It remains on this point to get the opinion of Admiral Cavagnari in order then to make a decision on merit. And this is the essential point because if failing the naval action we will need to entrust the direction of all to Graziani, give that as far as air force task to keep in mind the necessity to do their part also against enemy ships.

For the Aegean there is no ideas. Cappa has said to me that is proverbly saturated with aircraft and that moreover to the south, they are working to the limit of their range, is not clamed they have a great efficiency.

Therefore writing to Cavagnari show him the solution and to inquire what his ideas and concerns are, the matter he is obliged to put it in writing" ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

The question was place in very clean terms: in the middle of August they must have begin in Cyrenaica operations against the English troops located between *Sollum, Marsa Matruh and Siwa*. He was not from excluding that such operations will be opposed by British naval forces sailing from Alexandria. Some of them derived the necessity to organize sea and air operations, in conjunction with those of the ground, against the enemy fleet. Such possibility depended essentially on the efficiency of the R. Marina at that time ⁽⁶⁵⁾. Cavagnari answered at once that he counted at his disposal (as efficient units of the line) two *Giulio Cesar* type Battleships, seven 10,000 tons cruisers, eleven 5-8,000 tons cruisers, a group of forty naval destroyer and eighty submarines, but of which a notable share could be in the Atlantic. Of the new Battleships, the *Littorio* could also enter the line even though with hurried training; the *Vittorio Veneto* was delayed, some weeks being necessary work out the systems of the great guns, imperfections in some systems revealed themselves; on the *Duilio*, finally, it could not be counted on until the first of September, needing intensive training of the crew and putting right the material.

"(...) I do not think however advisable -Cavagnari specified -the engagement of the main nucleus of our Naval Forces in order to flank the advancing troops not only because the constitution of said forces will turn out, on the date indicated, fails to fulfill; but also because the area in which a crash with the main Forces of the enemy would be expectable would turn out strategically all favorable to English and disadvantageous for us (distance Marsa Matruh-Alexandria miles 135; Marsa Matruh-Taranto 760 miles)",

and concluded that this was being from anticipating their immediate contribution on part of R. Marina, apart from emergency situations that demanded the sortie to sea of the fleet, the employment of a mass of submarines in order to check and to oppose the movement of the enemy ships; the proposed employment of submarine minelayers in order to block the routes to and from Alexandria; the employment of light forces opportunely located on the Libyan coast for coastal bombardment, especially in the first days or

the operation ⁽⁶⁶⁾. Badoglio annotated in pencil: "It's a small thing". Until then, in fact, the offensive alignment of our submarines in the eastern Mediterranean had only obtained the sinking of a naval destroyer. After all, the problem of the offensive was restricted to the land and air forces of Libya. Giova added, with regard to that, the N .A. Comando Superiore had also made a study *the Alexandria operation*. Without coming down to the particular, they estimated that in order to strike the six or seven enemy divisions in Egypt it was necessary and sufficient a force of nine *entirely motorized* divisions: The 10th Army has three army corps for seven divisions (75,000 men total, of which 13,000 are Libyans); the "southern oases grouping" of the Gen. Maletti (8,500 men, of which 6,000 are Libyans) and the *Sirte* [61st] Inf. Div (9,400 men) in reserve. In total 92,000 men. As far as the materials, *presupposing entirely granted* all the requests made by Gen. D'Aponte in Rome the 4th and 5th of July ⁽⁶⁷⁾, there will still be necessary, at minimum, five groups of antiaircraft artillery of 75/46 or 88 mm. and seven army artillery groups of 149/13 mm. all with full amenities, attached motor vehicles; munitions supply, among which 100,000 armor-piercing shells; water, materials and *to top it all*, 5,200 heavy trucks ⁽⁶⁸⁾. Reducing to the divisions the risk of having was run to support a battle with forces inferior to those of the enemy and reducing the equipments for the continuation the operation risked canceling them for supply insufficiency. If the certainty had not existed to arrange for the foretold trucks "*we may be arrested in front of the enemy fortifications with 250 kilometers of desert to the rear*" ⁽⁶⁹⁾. Convinced, but, not to be able to receive as early as, in the best hypotheses, indispensable as calculating in order to reach Alexandria, Graziani had dedicated the first time, to which, the rest, of the was being limited also the examination by the High Commands ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

The 5 August talk at Palazzo Venezia, present also Badoglio and Soddu, began with clear tension, however soon became cordial enough. Graziani read one of his memos in which, in short, was confirming the concepts already expressed and of difficulties noted. The reasoning was convincing, as that the meeting concluded with the purpose to carry out an attack from Giarabub towards north with the Maletti grouping in order to eliminate the English bases on the border and to deliver an attack in order to reach the embankment of Sollum, with the idea, where matters where at the time to best, to continue their effort until to Sidi el Barrani ⁽⁷¹⁾. The following day Badoglio confirmed orally such decisions adding: "*if the English will engage*

in battle we will surely get the worse and rather than at Sidi el Barrani it will be able to think about also reaching Marsa Matruh" ⁽⁷²⁾ and promising to whole struggle of all aircraft available and the shipment of seven groups of artillery, thousand trucks, ammunitions and other material demanded in the course of the meeting. The optimism of Badoglio was for many out of place and baseless. In a action in the desert between armor and infantries he was not only risked to bet these, but was becoming rather child like thinking that the British troops would have accepted battle at Sidi el-Barrani without necessities -that place being threatened was not a objective of primary importance -rather then to allow a large advance and thread like Italian column, in great part dismounted, until to the moment in which it, exhausted, demoralized and by now very far from their bases, would have become easy prey.

Graziani was discontented. It does not seem a contradiction, but for him the objective of the first phase could not be that of Marsa Matruh, previous conquest to it being the embankment of Sollum, and that one of the second phase Alexandria. Sidi el-Barrani -115 kilometers from Bardia and 450 from Alexandria -being a location not a position: it lacks tactical meaning; it created logistic problems (water) and was easy object of envelopment. They spoke with Ciano, criticizing Badoglio because he did not calm the devotion of Mussolini and asserting: *"the water supply is above all insufficient. He will encounter a failure going into the desert and will soon transform unavoidably into a total disaster"*. Ciano reported at once to Mussolini, which showed *"a lot of grief since from the last talk with Graziani he had drawn the impression that the offensive would have had beginning within a few days"*. A dialogue between the deaf, but Ciano understood very well that the commander in chief of Libya *"did not want to attack at all, however not before two or three months"* ⁽⁷³⁾. Graziani departed again, therefore, displeased and preoccupied. He thought not to have been inclusive or, worse, that only he was left to resolve a most difficult national problem. In this state of mind, as soon as he returned to Africa said as much by behavior, but very soon he perceived the distrust around. He then resolved to call to report the highest military heads for a opened examination of the decision taken at Rome about their employment as soon as possible in a range of action, with the objective of Sidi el-Barrani. He did not want to define the convocation of a council of war, aware of the serious that meant he would have assumed, but surely was something very similar, so much so that the report drawn up by Gen. Garibaldi, vice-commander in chief beyond that

commander of the 5th the Army, was countersigned from all those present and closed in a meaningful way:

"In conclusion as said above, we unanimous assert that in the current conditions an offensive worthy of the name is not possible, but only to carry out small operations intending to maintain prestige on the adversary, in order to mark predominance on them".

To speak sense, in those circumstances, of prestige and predominance on the enemy sound badly, but is obvious the embarrassment of a situation that was made more and more painful, in a special way on the area of moral. And clearly the lack of them feeling there was a sure hand on the rudder. The report continued giving a specific answer to the question placed by Graziani: how many major units was it possible to motorize as a body. With regard to what he asserted that, the permanent stationing and the operating engagements of the moment (model columns, detachments, etc.) -strange hypothesis in truth given the problem to resolve – himself would not be successful to put on wheels even one division; for against, modifying stationing and engagements but safeguarding the requirements for the Maletti grouping, a such number of trucks could be recovered to motorize a Army corps of two divisions ⁽⁷⁴⁾. Then Graziani determined to outline the consequences and wrote to Badoglio offering resignation from the assignment:

"(...) the unanimous opinion of all summoned persons, among which their numbered men of various temperament, but all commanders of the first order, tried and proven in peace and war, have been unanimously and decidedly contrary to every possibility of offensive action, al so are reduced in the indicated limits (Sidi el Barrani), in dependency of the enemy makeup from Sidi el Barrani to Sollum (is much different from that of 15 July), but above all for the persistent insufficiency of means of transport at our disposition (also to arising from the inclemency of the season and the extreme scarcity of water).

At forefront of the opinion of men all responsible and unsuspected patriotic and war spirit, let alone of highest experienced technical ability in war, not myself and remained that to ask, after meticulous and exhausting contradictory argument, the putting into the report of the arguments dealt with and the relative conclusions.

Of their oral statements a copy of the original countersigned from all those present.

Given the situation that emerges and at the forefront to my personal impotence to shelve the deficiency of means, while many expectations feed from the superior hierarchies and from the Motherland for resolute action of short expiration on this front, it imposes a painful task:

1st or to receive the directives of action adapted to the state of described fact, that and all other commanders with much painful uncertainty for soldiers who in all their life have given with extreme every usury audacity, when this could shape triumph;

2nd or an advanced inspection that directly judges the merit of how much in the report is sanctioned.

It is finally obvious and right for me, in such a contingency, to put my person at complete disposition of the Higher Authorities, in case this can be thought useful"

⁽⁷⁵⁾,

Then, in attendance of the decisions of Rome, Graziani gave his directives to the commanders the 5th and 10th Armies, 5th Air Fleet and to Intendente Superiore ⁽⁷⁶⁾: To conduct mobile defensive-assets meant to control flanks and rear and to reject or to destroy English armored infiltrations; guideline to the passage to the offensive at the "*good moment*". On the first point, in effects, there was little for innovating. On the enemy activity of mechanized patrols our analogous action as best was as contrasted as was possible to make, its not that, while the enemy could count on some, points of reference the small border garrisons and more advanced positions, or direct their to an activity of disturbance in our rear along the few tracks and roads open to truck traffic and on the coastal road, the motorized columns of the 10th Army often met emptiness and came therefore to represent a more rather expensive contrast because of the usury which subordinates put motor vehicles and tanks, without to obtaining any appreciable results. However, in July and August the British continued in episodes, in truth less frequent than they were in the beginning, and the Italian patrolling, especially in the sector Bardia-Fort Capuzzo-Sidi Azeiz which for the first time had been employed the M.11 tanks: the enemy had to abandon four tanks, two of which were towed to our lines.

3. THE ADVANCE ON SIDI EL-BARRANI.

When Graziani in Libya reached the determination to offer his resignation, in Rome something was happening that only with much fantasy could be imagined. Mussolini from the first of August was returning on an intervention against Yugoslavia, to which he had added Greece. The former planned for the beginning of next September ⁽⁷⁷⁾, the second for to the end of the same month ⁽⁷⁸⁾, even if the studies -in the form of P.R. 12 regarded solely Yugoslavia for the moment. In fact on 10 August the General Staff of the Army, presented the measures to place in motion the aforesaid operations on the alpine sector (Julia front, Carinzia and Stiria) and in those Zaratino and Albanian, had sped up a clarification with regard to and proposed to renouncing initiatives in Albania, give- the burdens that they would derive ⁽⁷⁹⁾. Badoglio then decided that studies and predispositions for the Yugoslavian intervention were improved on the following bases: formation to the Giulio border in fifteen days from the order and formation of the 6th Army in the Stiria -Carinzia in a month from the order. He also authorized to begin contacts with the German High Command in order to realize the planning of the foretold formation of the 6th Army beyond frontier and the possibility of German assemble 5,000 trucks for the services of Army ⁽⁸⁰⁾. Moreover, a week latter, the Viceroy of Ethiopia wrote to place before them the opportunity to start a study for an offensive towards the Sudan, to be delivered in conjunction with that verses the Suez Canal that Graziani would have begun by the end of September- first of October ⁽⁸¹⁾, and later he answered on the request asking if the Viceroy thought it preferable, maybe, to head for Khartum or Port Sudan, stating that "*our ultimate objectives are the Suez Canal and the communications of the Red Sea*" ⁽⁸²⁾.

In this picture, 14 August Mussolini had received Lieutenant General of the King in Albania, Jacomoni, and Vice Count Gen. Prasca, commander of the troops of Albania, at Venice Palace accompanied by Ciano, and had fixed "*the political and military lines for the action against Greece*" before the end of August ⁽⁸³⁾. It's not that however on, 17 August ambassador Alfieri, in Berlin, informed Ribbentrop had explicitly told him, referring to Yugoslavia and Greece, that whatever engagement, it is beyond the character of technical study, towards issues not closely relating to the war with Great Britain would be only disperse. In particular, then, a change of the Balkan status quo could represent

a most dangerous pretense for an participation of the U .S.S.R. in that European area, than instead the Axis had total interest in maintaining the most absolute tranquility⁽⁸⁴⁾. Mussolini backtracked, hitting the brake, but he thought about being able to return. From several sources indiscretions and signals coming from Berlin indicated the attack on England was imminent (*"Mussolini believe them to be accurate -Ciano wrote -and is convinced that by the end of next month we will have the victory and peace. For this he wanted to accelerate the time table in Egypt"*)⁽⁸⁵⁾. In such a state of mind he sent to Cirene a message that, at his warning, Graziani had to sweep away every hesitation:

"Marshal Graziani, Libya. The invasion of G.B. is decided, its on, course is set and will happen. Approximately the time can be between one week to a month. On the day in which the first platoon of German soldiers will touch English territory, you will simultaneously attack. Once again I repeat you do not have fixed territorial objectives, not to aim yourself at Alexandria and not even to Sollum. I ask you only to attack the English forces that you have on the front. I assume the full personal liability of this my decision.

You had in mind to attack on the 15th of July as soon as joined by the tanks. There has been much analyze -from the climate point of view also -to wait for a better time. In the interval, completing the effort that you are in a best position to estimate, we have sent you all that has been possible. You have a certain superiority of effectiveness, equipment and moral. Five ships of the line are ready. We can make an ultimate concentration of aircraft. After twelve months of waiting and preparation it is time to attack the forces that defend Egypt. I do not have doubts on the definitive outcome of the battle.

Strike the enemy, the greater breath the lesser the unraveling its will give the rule to us for the ultimate action. Marshal Graziani, as already I said you in our last talk, time works against of us. The loss of Egypt will be the *coup d' Grâce* for G .B., while this rich country -necessary for our communications with Ethiopia -is the great prize that Italy desires and that -they are sure -you will give to them. Answer me by telegraph, confirming receipt⁽⁸⁶⁾.

First part was clearly: for reasons purely political it was necessary to attack, and therefore it was sufficient to attack without the preoccupation to reach an objective. The movement could seem hazardous, however he, the Supreme Commander, assumed; the full responsibility of the order. The second part was centralized

on the appraisal deriving more from superficialities and incompetence that they give disloyalty: the certain superiority of effectives, equipment and moral. To speak with satisfaction of the numerical advantage in those circumstances is evident sign of thinking which is confused in substance. To speak about equipment superiority could appear purely false if, also to this purpose, he was probably not a self-deception: sure the 400 Italian tanks were more than the 300 English ⁽⁸⁷⁾, but reality the technique turned upside down the relationship; the same can be said for the artilleries and even, as it turned out, for the aircraft. Finally, to assert the supremacy in the moral field was simple illusion: the uncertainty of command, the inferiority of the materials, the enemy aggressiveness had provoked many doubts. And other reasons of displeasure existed. A informative note of the general directorate office of G S. of the Comando Supremo on the conditions of the public spirit deduced from postal censorship dated 30 August summarized complaints currents among the units of Africa:

"The soldiers in Africa -especially those who write from Cyrenaica - complain the difficulty in changing the garments, the insufficient water ration, the bad confection and the lack of the often out of order mess, the high cost of drinks and canned food in the shops (the someone asserts that the wine costs 20 Liras to the liter), the onslaught of parasites and finally the impossibility of getting writing paper. The complaints for the lack of writing paper, that the soldiers demand in order to answer to the families at home, are rather more diffuse and seems that on such kind, in Africa, a clear speculation practices (a non-commissioned officer in Cyrenaica writes to have to pay 10 Liras for a notepad with little sheets, of the kind that in Italy cost one Lira; someone in I.E.A. complains to have finally to pay 5 Liras for a leaflet and one envelope)" ⁽⁸⁸⁾.

Undeniably all that could not provoke critics, above all because the entire postal organization was poor and slow: the correspondence reached with enormous unjustifiably delays and were they take place attended by errors in postal delivery.

The third part of the message played in a pronounced manner in several ways. At first he deemed it sufficient to attack the forces that faced the 10th Army, now abruptly was passed to give for discounting the victorious outcome of a large field battle, in which appeared uncertain was the only dimension of the British defeat and whose sure consequence -more or less quickly -was the conquest of Egypt. The substantial evolution of language, intentions turned out obvious and expected the result. If first part was expressed

he expressed in such way to render reasonable "*I obey*", the last one contained all the elements since Graziani confirmed the assumed position. Graziani instead answered: "*the orders will be executed*" ⁽⁸⁹⁾ and Mussolini, received nearly at the same time letter 04/op. of the 18th with his resignation and telegram 3031/op. of the 20th with the act of obedience, replied: "*Yours is the answer that I awaited*" ⁽⁹⁰⁾, and two days latter, the 22nd, in the daily report said to Badoglio to mass against Egypt with the three Armed Forces in order to realize renown with in time with the German attack. The Yugoslavia and Greek hypotheses were abandoned. Or better: the defensive alignment on the Julian frontier had to take place for 20 October rather than the 20th of September and that verses Greece for the end of September. Badoglio cheered up, however Mussolini had not at all abdicated the guidelines towards the Balkans, but simply moved the dates; that therefore on one side he suspected that the fire remained ignited under the ash and from the other it created two requirements for completion, massing on the spot and transports that could not distract from North Africa.

Graziani was feeling more and more uneasiness. The discord with the commander of the 10th Army was emerging in full force. These, the receipt of the orders for the offensive, were answered with a difficulty series of -the usual -they, also not expressing a refusal, were allowed to attend the impossibility to move without provisions from on high. In other words, he remained in the attitude illustrated in the meeting of the 18th. Graziani did not attend such retort and instead asked the replacement of Gen. Berti, wrote the executive order -to depart from the 27th -with Sollum as the objective, requesting a copy of the operations order of the army and informing the Comando Supremo in detail. ⁽⁹¹⁾ Doing more: the 25th, passing the command post of the 10th Army, he signaled to Berti, to look at, the original text of the message from Mussolini of the 19th. All this was enough to create the state of relationships between the two interested commanders and to enter Egypt.

In Rome the development of the Mussolinian understandings continued. Ciano had telegraphed to Salisburgo that, according to Hitler, his invasion imposed a series of predispositions, the greater part of which was already in action, but that determining one -to beat the English fighters -demanded at least three weeks of good weather. It was moreover impressed on Ciano that the German side had expressed the conviction, first openly, that the war could be resolved within the course of the year. After this telephone call of the 29th followed the decision of Mussolini to march in any case. The same day Badoglio telegraphed:

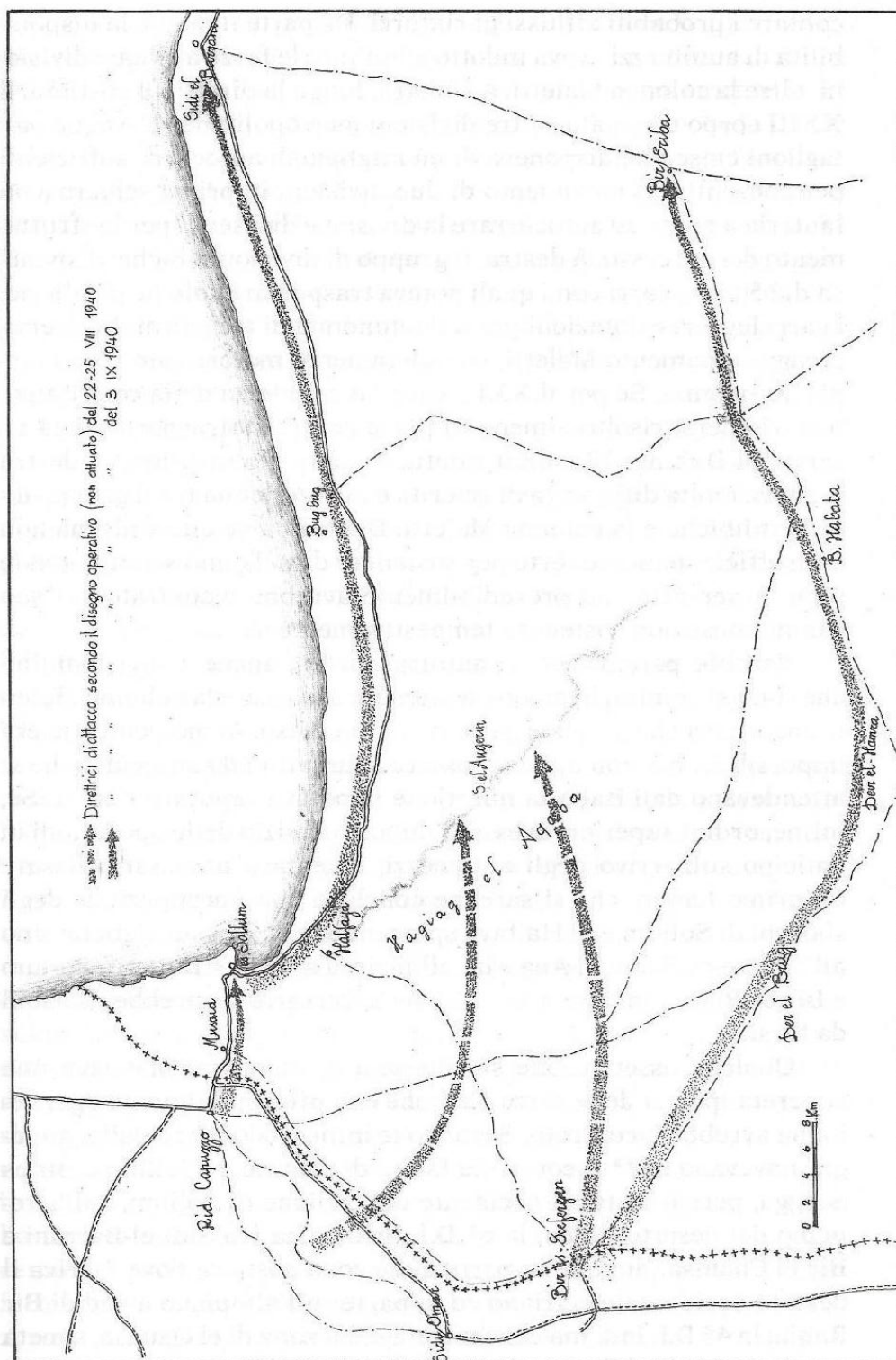
"Il Duce has determined that the attack against the English in Cyrenaica has to take place even if the Germans themselves do not decide to carry out the invasion. And because if an agreement is reached between the Germans and English, we would remain outside of that argument if we do not have at least a battle against the English.

Therefore hold ready for between the 8th and 10th of September. I will then send you the official notice of the date.

Buy that time you will have received all the demanded material and it will affect Pricolo because there is being sent the necessary aircraft" ⁽⁹²⁾.

Then Badoglio informed Cavagnari and Pricolo, one by simple note, the other in order to outline aircraft reinforces requested by the Libyan Comando Superiore, excluding unfortunately cargo aircraft, the few existing constituting the only tenuous connection with the Empire. Graziani taking action, personally communicated to Berti and, with the directed collaborating of Gen. Bergonzoli, commander of XXIII Corp, examined, once again, the terms of the problem. The embankment of Sollum, rugged cliffs and impervious, it was approachable from the west only in three points: Sollum, Halfaya and Bir er-Rabia. The first two were covered by good roadways that found continuation in the coast; the third instead was crossed by a discreet automotive track that reached Bug Bug. The section included between Halfaya and Bir er Rabia, more than fifty kilometers, was absolutely lacking in passages and therefore the outlet did not correspond with the sea. Consequently, those who meant to proceed on Sidi el-Barrani from the Ramla - Fort Capuzzo-Bir Sceferzen front had two alternatives: to give an outlet for them on the coast, revolving around the passes of Sollum and Halfaya or to go around the embankment for the track Gabr bu Fares-Bir er Rabia-Bir Enba-Sidi el Barrani. The two tracks had development respectively at 100 and 160 kilometers from the border and until the height of Bug Bug remained separated by the embankment without some possibility of tactical struggle. In short, the simple occupation of the embankment of Sollum, not being able to end up in the plain below, would have substance, an element of weakness since it would have exposed the flank of the formation to the skillful offenses of the opposing armor. Therefore -always according to this appraisal- in order to confer development to the maneuver, it was absolutely necessary to stretch to the occupation of Sidi el-Barrani (sketch n. 5). The operation would have been very profitable if one realized a twofold turning: on the left along the coast and to the right long the Bir er Rabia-Bir Enba track, carried out with motorized troops. The enemy forces doubtlessly to face would translate at least into three divisions, with our

I PROGETTI PER L'AVANZATA SU SIDI EL BARRANI



to count the probable flow of reinforcements. From the Italian side, the availability of motor vehicles had imposed a limit on the forces to five divisions, besides the Maletti column. On the left, along the coastal route, the XXIII Arm y Corps of three metropolitan divisions with five battalions each; they had a thousand trucks, sufficient in order to allow the movement of two divisions in the primary formation (with infantry on foot) and to motorize the division of the reserve for the exploitation of the successes. On the right, the group of Libyan divisions: they had 650 trucks with which they could only transport the artilleries, the light tanks and endowments for an autonomy of three days. In reserve the Maletti grouping, completely motorized and with wide autonomy. If for the XXIII Corps the problem could be quickly resolved at least in part with the trucking of the reserve, the 23 March CC.NN. Div. reduced to four battalions, to the right existed much difference of speed and autonomy between the Libyan divisions group and the Maletti column. On the other side this last one was not sufficiently strongly in order to support alone a action with the enemy forces that expectably would have met on its way, if not supported timely ⁽⁹³⁾.

Therefore it would have been necessary to auto-transport also the Libyan divisions (14.000 men) so as to obtain with them and the Maletti column a mass that would have guaranteed success. At the time that was impossible, but as soon as the 600 trucks that arrived from Italy were disembarked the issue could not considered resolved. If, finally, superior orders had imposed the beginning of operations in advance of the arrival of the motor vehicles, it became necessary to fix a primary time, than the right would have concluded the occupation of the outlets of Sollum and Halfaya pushing on the border until to the height of Suani el-Augerin, to about halfway between Sollum and Bir er-Rabia. On basis of the enemy reaction he would have been decided what to do.

Some observations on the maneuver design. Lacked a concrete hypothesis the enemy forces that doubtlessly every column would have met. According to the acquired information, the English had the 7th Arm. Div. in the strip of border from Sollum to Bir es Scegga, therefore all to the West of the embankment of Sollum, on the plateau of the Libyan desert; the 6th British Inf. Div. between Sidi el-Barrani and Bir el-Chamsa, therefore in part of the coastal zone where the Egyptian western desert died and in part on the plateau to south of Bir Rabia; the 4th Indian Inf. Div. concentrated in the zone of el Qauasa, halfway between Sidi el-Barrani and Marsa Matruh; the entrenched camp of

Marsa Matruh with an Anglo-Egyptian garrison of one or two divisions; then the New Zealand Inf. Div. from Fuka to el-Alamein; finally the troops in the Delta. In conclusion, it was necessary to surely face the 7th Arm. Div., the 6th British Inf. Div. and the 4th Indian Inf. Div., perhaps also New Zealand Div. The garrison of Marsa Matruh could be considered outside of the fight. If this picture had been real, the plan of Graziani would have possessed all requirement in order to fail at the start: the 7th Arm. Div. would have cut to pieces the two Libyan divisions and the Maletti grouping and, aiming at Halfaya, then bottled the XXIII Army Corps blocked at Sidi el-Barrani by the 6th British and by the 4th Indian. But the picture was not exact and the enemy, perhaps also overestimating the operating consistency of the Italian effort, had for a long time decided not to accept the combat. As we know, of the 6th British was joining the single Command, as it had itself become under the Command of the *Western Desert Force*, and of the other divisions the effectives were considerably incomplete, if in part adapted from non-divisional battalions moved from the Delta. To honor the truth it was noted that British major units were under the organic strength, however did not know themselves until to that point what was the deficit and in the doubt he stretched himself to take in consideration the worse case. The itself add the skillful use of false tanks into effect by the English side.

Graziani had expressed the fear that the occupation of the embankment of Sollum until to the passage of Bir er-Rabia exposed the right of the front to turning from the south. True, but the danger existed equally for the occupation limited to the height of Suani el-Augerin. And it would have always existed for both the contenders, forced by nature of things to support a flank on the sea. Therefore it was necessary to accept this unavoidable situation, employing on the exposed side the bulk of the armored forces. The maneuver design was at once communicated to the Comando Supremo, but it raised a doubt: the 600 trucks of which he made noted in the plan which were? The 1st of September 230 motor vehicles had arrived at Tripoli, the 7th was foreseen for disembarkation of the first 100, the 13th (probably) for an additional 360, the remaining quarter shipment of approximately 400 were foreseen before the 20th of September. Based on this date the Comando Supremo wanted to know if for the offensive it was necessary to receive also the fourth group. Graziani tried to clear the issue quickly, by special courier, confirmed because the necessity of the foretold quarter share the equipment could "only reach by act of God by the end of September or within the first ten days of October", he specified to think it appropriate

from the narrow operating point of view to defer the offensive action for the aforesaid term". And he added that the deferment would have helped so to the amassing in Tobruk and Bardia of equipment *"still in large part spaced out very far behind "* and that surely the enemy, before our limited offensive of the line Sollum -Halfaya -Gabr bu Fares -Bir Chreigat, would have declared that he would get exhausted for our logistical insufficiency or so that it be demolished at birth ⁽⁹⁴⁾.

The clarification intercrossed with a personal letter of Badoglio:

"(...) In my opinion you would have done better to send long before those considerations that now sent.

I have been more than two months preparing this action and had therefore time to determine all its particulars.

In any case as soon as you receive this my letter will to know the day in which you will be ready to deliver the offensive with the objective of Sidi Barrani.

I will in any case try to convince the Duce to wait until to that day,

Endeavor but do not delay to too much, otherwise I foresee that he will telegraph you to attack all the same" ⁽⁹⁵⁾.

Graziani felt unjustly under accusation and replied with a bitter telegram ⁽⁹⁶⁾. In the afternoon, at 15:30 hrs, he received a dispatch from Rome: *"Duce orders that the noted operation will begin Monday the 9th next"* ⁽⁹⁷⁾. This was unavoidable. But there is to ask if the two previous months had been truly used in the best manner. The same objective had been determined after an amazing see-saw. The conclusion was still more amazing: the unexpected outline of the maneuver design.

At 18:30 hrs of the 7th Graziani left Benghazi in order to return to Cirene. Road building, reconsidered all the elements of the offensive: the difficulties of the march on foot in the Marmaricon desert in that period, I give, the consequent slowness of movement, the sure participation of the English 7th Arm. Div. against the Libyan divisions and the Maletti grouping. Now it seemed that the probabilities of succeeding were very insufficient. In these disheartening reflections, it arose the unexpected the idea to invert the maneuver being left with the entire mass on the coastal strip. In his opinion the new solution would have had the advantages of the concentration of the means on one single line of operations, of the simplification of the supply, the best contribution

of the air force. When he arrived in Cirene, around 21:30 hrs, the decision was made: only attempt with the Libyan divisions group in the first formation, the XXIII Corp. in second formation, the 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN] in army reserve, the Maletti grouping under the direct command of the Comando Superiore. Meeting immediately with Gens. Berti, Porro, Maletti and Giordano, Graziani explained in a few words the reasons that he had induced a change of the operating design and concluded:

"The Libyan divisions group is moved from Gabr Saleh-Bir el Gobi towards Capuzzo and it is put ahead of the metropolitan divisions. Once established at Capuzzo, fighting between the sea and the embankment and its goal is Sidi el Barrani.

While, covered by the Libyan divisions and the air force, is developed the movement of the metropolitan troops of the XXIII Army Corps .The 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN.] Division, truck borne, constitutes the army reserve. The Maletti grouping must protect the right flank of the army -from the sort of threats coming from Sceferzen-Bir el Khreigat. Through Tobruk -Bir el Gobi -Gabr Saleh will carry itself initially to Sidi Omar.

In synthesis: there must be developed a determined maneuver of all the land and aerial forces that must carry to us to Bug Bug and Sidi Barrani, due to the direction of the coast" ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

The oral directives were quickly confirmed by written ones and the next day Gen. Berti circulated the operations orders. Confronting the directives of the Comando Superiore and the orders for the Commander of the 10th Army ⁽⁹⁹⁾, his eyes missed an anomaly: Graziani in reality did not give directives on the contrary gave executive orders and Berti repeats them almost entirely ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾, to the point that the first one, when he read the operations order of the army, hurried to summon the commanders in the same night of the 9th, indeed in the first hours of the 9th, for explaining their thinking, yet it looked like that dates were not in harmony with what we wanted to accomplish. In other words, the offensive was not entrusted to the 10th Army, as would have been correct, nor -least of all -to the Commander of the XXIII Corp, as would have been possible, but it was directly regulated from the Supreme Commander with pure and simple intrusiveness of the attributions of the inferior levels. And still an observation is to be made. The Intendenza received the task to assure the operation of the services until Bardia, *"for the time follow the intent of the orders"*, now, the issue was under discussion for weeks, or better for months, and appeared in great part conditioned from the logistic aspect: seems

therefore rather strange that the Comando Superiore did not think to give precise orders to their own Intendenza, when the question at the heart of the problem was reduced to decide between two solutions: to conserve Bardia as a forward base to supply and to reinforce to house to the major units advancing or be constituted at Fort Capuzzo a logistics center in a position to replenish the supplies until to Sidi el-Barrani leaving the replenishment of supply to the XXIII Corp. or adopting a mixed system. After all, if for "*the successive phases*" he had intended in the second phase were unthinkable that in the three days duration of the first phase he could improvise anything; if instead referrers to after the occupation of Sidi el Barrani, evidently the initial device of Intendenza had to render the entire operation possible.

The deployment for the attack on the 7th of September was the following. In a wide semicircle anchored on the sea -Tobruk -Bir el Gobi -Gabr Saleh -Bardia -the body of the 10th Army was collected: the XXIII Corps with the *Cirene* [63rd], the *Marmarica* [62nd] and 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN] around Bardia; the XXII with the *Catanzaro* [64th] and 3 *Gennaio* [4th CC.NN] around Tobruk; the Libyan group to the interior, at Bir el-Gobi and Gabr Saleh. At Derna was the Maletti battle group; in the area of Cirene (300 kilometers from the border) the XXI Corp with the *Sirte* [61st] and 28 *Ottobre* [2nd CC.NN]; in the area of Benghazi (500 kilometers from the border) the artillery grouping of the Comando Superiore. As we know, only a part of these troops was involved in the offensive, just the XXIII Corp and the Libyan divisions group and the Maletti battle group.

The support artilleries, functioning as maneuver group, were formed in two Regiments. One constituted from two 75/27 groups of the 202nd Artillery, one 105/28 battery and two 149/35 batteries; other from the 12th Artillery and a 105/28 group.

The operation was marked the rhythm in two phases. The first (9-11 September) consisted simply of the assumption of the departure alignment: the Libyan grouping waiting between Fort Capuzzo and Bir Ghirba; to cover, south of the via Balbia, the XXIII Corp with the two metropolitan divisions; 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN], motorized, and the 1st Tank Regiment in Army reserve at Sidi Azeiz; the Maletti grouping at Sidi Omar and, finally, the two artillery regiments at the frontier, between the sea and Fort Capuzzo. The second phase, whose beginning was foreseen for the 12th of September, was represented as the development of the offensive: the Libyan divisions had to pass Sollum and Halfaya in order, to descend to the coastal strip and to proceed

placed side by side towards Bug Bug-Sidi el Barrani; the XXIII Army Corps had the task to follow the movement in its turn, coming down from the embankment as soon as the first formation had created space. The reserve itself was made up of a tank units also of recent constitution. The 29th of August the Tank units of Libya had been organized into a unique unit formation (Gen. Babini), with two Regiments, each with a medium tank battalion and three light tank battalions. Centralization, however, reasons was being to simplify training and control; for the employment the component elements were oriented to act with various major units. For such complex circumstances of forces commanded by the 10th Army, some of them previewed a wide decentralization: the 1st Regiment (Col. Aresca), assigned the LXII and LXIII light tank battalions respectively to the *Marmarica* [62nd] and the *Cirene* [63rd], remained in reserve with the I medium (M.11) tank battalion and the XXI light tank battalion; the 2nd Regiment (Col. Trivioli), yielded the IX light tank battalion to the 2nd Libyan Division and the II medium (M.11) tank battalion to the Maletti [3rd Libyan] column, located at Bardia at disposition of the Army were the XX and the LXV light tank battalions, without part in the offensive.

Graziani counted a lot on the aerial support and in truth the General Staff of the Air Force had supplied to the complete satisfaction nearly all of the demands advanced by Gen. Porro. The 5th Air Fleet, constituted on the 15th of July with the 13th division of four bombing stormi* (10th, 14th, 15th and 33rd), the 14th brigade of two stormi (2nd Fighter and the 50th Ground Attack) and 175th R.S.T. squadron**, had been continuously upgraded. From the 1st of July to the 15th of August there flowed into Africa the 9th Fighter group, the 33rd and 54th bomber group, the 7th combat group, the 67th observation group more than 12 SM.79, 42 C.R. 42, 5 Ca. 310 and 12 B.88 for reinforcements and organic completion. For the higher demands for the offensive they were granted the 151st Fighter group with 30 C.R. 42, the 9th Bomber stormo with 32 SM.79, 12 more C.R. 42 fighters for organic completion and one squadron of the first torpedo bombers. Moreover the personnel of the 10th Bombing stormo had returned to Italy and the aircrafts had been distributed between the other units.

Therefore the 5th Air Fleet at the beginning of the offensive numbered on 300 serviceable combat aircrafts: 110 bombers, 135 fighters, 45 ground attack and 4 torpedo bombers ⁽¹⁰¹⁾. Against them it was thought there was as many English. But Pricolo perceived that, if needed from the current circumstances and if the situation on the ground –a problem of difficult solution -could still be sent one or two bombing stormi

*Stormo is the equivalent of a Group with Stormi as plural, Gruppo is the equivalent of a Wing, with Groupi as plural. A Stormo made up of 2 or more squadrons. A Gruppo made up of two or more Stormo.

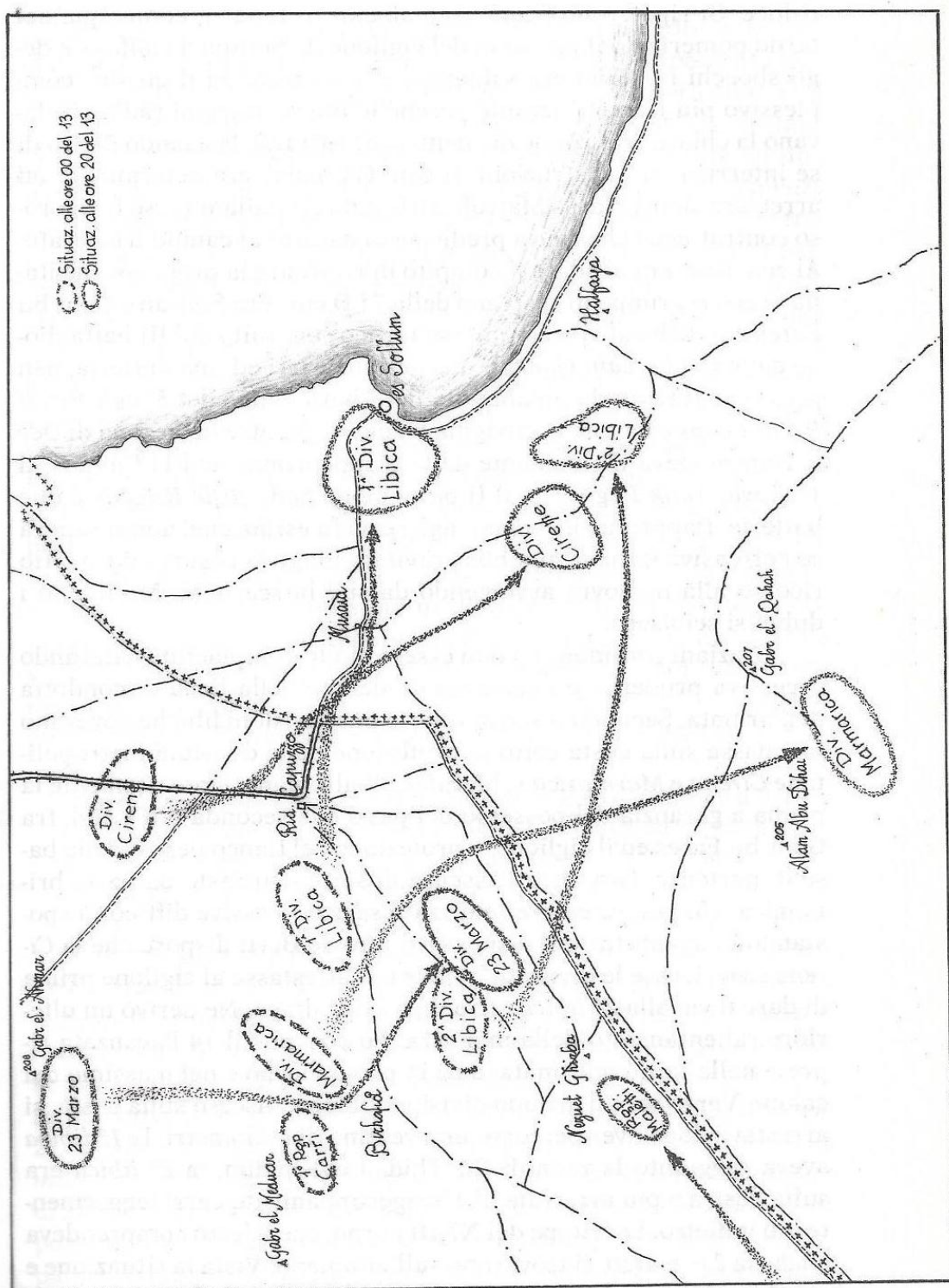
** Land based Reconnaissance

and a small allocation of fighters.

The assumption of the arrangement at the departure positions was carried out without appreciable disturbance from the enemy side. One series of disadvantages unfortunately rendered rather convulsive those first four days. The commander of the army began with ignoring, in the distribution of his orders, the Maletti battle group because it was not under his command, what that provoked the participation of the supreme commander ⁽¹⁰²⁾. Gen. Maletti moved quickly ahead, leaving at Derna the antiaircraft artillery battalion allotted him and reaching Gabr Saleh the Libyan divisions with a consequent dangerous accumulation of units, therefore he continued for Sidi Omar deviating from the direction of movement and wandering aimlessly. Gen. Bergonzoli, in his turn, moved fast himself, ended located with part of the motorized troops on the same line as the Libyan divisions, provoking a crossings of columns and clogging of roads and tracks. At dawn of the 12th, Graziani, little satisfied how events turned out and of the action of Commander di Berti, he decided on a twenty-four hours of pause in order to clarify and put things back in order the Maletti grouping and to allow rest for the Libyans ⁽¹⁰³⁾, then, reflecting on the difficulties met by Maletti, changed the initial orders. In fact the excessive consumption of fuel due to the circulation of some equipment in the desert, the slowness of the progression caused by motor damages to the and sinking of the vehicles into the sand, the necessities of water resupply and the appreciable repercussions of the aerial bombing which the column had been subordinate, had affected operating ability and logistic autonomy of the grouping. Not disputed that the unexpected rest day, of necessary on one hand, for damage on the other: was a better understanding of the situation that it permitted the enemy. All these negative elements induced Graziani to cancel the short encircling radius of Bug Bug that Maletti would have had to carry out after having protected the exposed flank, and to pass the grouping to the command of the army so that it was used like a quick attack unit, for the pass of Halfaya, on the coast and to reach, joining the 23 Marzo [1st CC.NN], Sidi el-Barrani.

The advance beyond border began on the morning of the 13th (sketch n. 6). it was preceded by the participations of artillery and aviation, but in truth the adversary limited himself to the activity of observation and disturbance. At 08:30 High Sollum was occupied. The enemy, himself retiring, had removed the motor to the continuous movement cableway, destroyed the machinery for raising water and the

Schizzo n. 6



light systems. The repeated mixing up of units, however in the late afternoon the possession of the embankment from Sollum to Halfaya and of the outlets to the plan was firmly insured and the total picture was more reassuring because radio interceptions revealed the clear intention of the enemy to retire, leaving behind him interruptions and destruction. Gen. O'Connor was determined to withdraw until to Marsa Matruh, attracting the Italians towards the strong counterattack that he had predisposed in front of the entrenched field. To Gen. Gott was entrusted the task to delay the Italian progress with the support group of the 7th Arm. Div. Between Sollum and Gabr bu Fares was located a tactical grouping constituted by the III battalion of the *Coldstream Guards*, one tank section and one battery, very soon reinforced by part of the I battalion of the *King's Royal Rifles Corps* and by a French company; while in the area of Der el-Hamra was the remainder of the advanced troops: the 11th Hussars, the 1st *Royal Tank Regiment*, the II battalion of the *Rifle Brigade* and two batteries. At first, in the English camp, there was hesitation: they did not know if the Italian offensive would have gravitated along the coast or fact resort to the maneuver wrapping from the bare south. But soon the doubts were melted.

Graziani continued not to be very pleased, finding excessive precaution and lack of dash in the line of conduct of the army. According to his warning, the two Libyan divisions had to mass on the coast under the protection of the metropolitan divisions *Cirene* [63rd] and *Marmarica* [62nd] lined up on the plateau, and just before to guarantee the possession of the passes and a second one more to south, between Gabr bu Fares and the embankment, to protection of the right flank of the line of departure. Now, absent data of serious opposition on the British side, this could be realized without excessive difficulties moving in the entire device. Instead Berti decided that the *Cirene* [63rd] move ahead of the Libyan divisions and was stopped on the embankment before starting the 2nd *Libyan* beyond the Halfaya pass. They caused a further slowing down of the maneuver. It was therefore that on the 14th the advance resumed in the late morning, that is to say in broad daylight and in the maximum of the heat. Towards evening the Libyan divisions group, come down to the coast, was stopped after to having covered a score of kilometers: the 1st *Libyan* had reached the area of Bir Thidan el-Khadim, the 2nd *Libyan* was more to the right rear and, the 1st Light Tank Regiment more behind. The troops of the XXIII Corp, that now also included the *23 Marzo* [1st CC.NN], were found on the plateau. Seen the situation and considering it more and more obvious English intention to withdraw,

Berti determined to operate ahead of the two Libyan divisions with the motorized units, the 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN] and the Maletti grouping, which he entrusted the attainment of the intermediate objective Bug Bug –Sanyet el Sabil ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. This last the choice of locality aroused some uncertainty. Sayet el-Sabil was a crossroads some thirty kilometers to south of Bug Bug and controlled the origins from the plateau, along the track between Bir Sofafi and Bir er-Rabia, but it was found in full desert and though it was in the middle of the desert and had to get there follow the trail departing from Bug Bug. The whole case did not seem proper to increase in such a way the frontal attack and to proceed with two units spaced therefore between them. Therefore Graziani began with asking clarification. Then weigh the information given him from aerial reconnaissance of the approximate presence of a English armored group towards Der el-Hamra. He did not know exactly of what it was -it was the 1st *Royal Tank Regiment* that Gen. Gott tried to move towards the north and that for various hitches did not succeed to inserting themselves into the fight -but, presuming it was the enemy countermove to the hypothetical Italian turning from south, judged the favorable circumstances in order to head decidedly to Sidi el-Barrani: in such a way the British armored units if they had continued would have been stopped by the metropolitan divisions placed to defend Halfaya, in the opposite eventuality it would have been withdrawn towards the east. In all the cases they would not have had the time to contrast the conquest of Sidi el-Barrani.

"You hold account this favorable situation -Graziani to Berti wrote -for your development 01/7555 and acted with maximum rapidity on Barrani because I judge this moment decisive (...). I assume full responsibility of this order" ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾.

But Berti in the meantime had just modified the thought. Discovering the Libyan divisions by now hardly ten kilometers from Bug Bug, considered not very necessary to their move forward and instead preferred the employment of the motorized reserve for the prosecution of the action in depth. Decided, therefore, the resumption of the offensive on part of the: 1st *Libyan* division on Bug Bug and the 2nd on Suani el-Augerin. As far as the XXIII Corp, he ordered that the 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN] and the 1st Tank Regiment, even though it was now under the orders of Bergonzoli, was moved in the area of Thidan el-Khadim, yes from being able to move towards Bug Bug or Suani el-Augerin; the Maletti grouping was stopped on the embankment of Halfaya; Moved the *Cirene* [63rd] some kilometer towards south-east and the *Marmarica* [62nd]

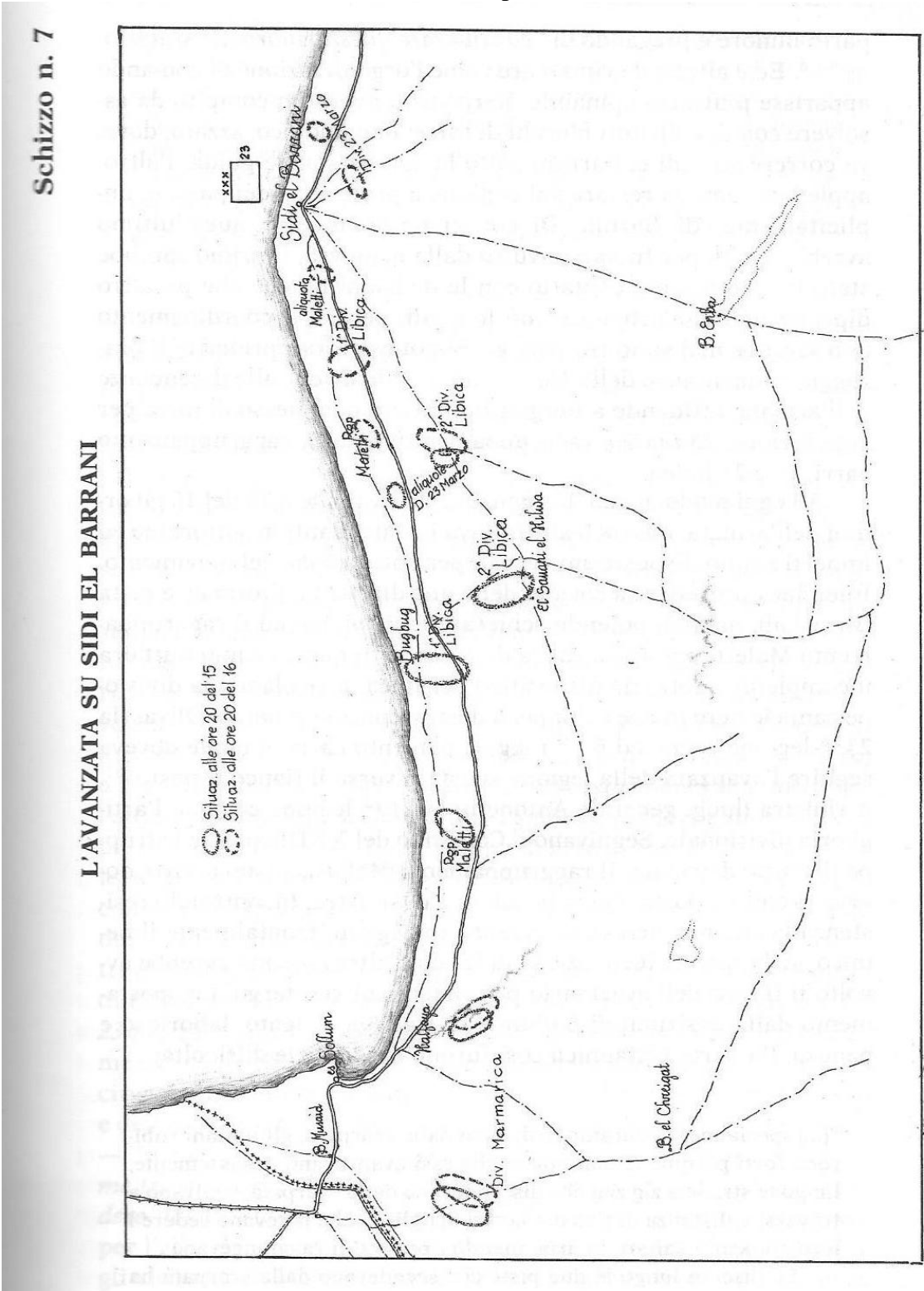
occupied the cross-roads to south of Gabr bu Fares ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. As he looked at, the detailed employment of XXIII Corp already had been indicated by the army. Berti also was preoccupied by the possible offense towards the north departing from the oasis of Siwa, but Graziani reiterated the requests:

"Not there is a moment to hesitate. Given the orders in relation to my 01/541 op. I gave orders directly to the Air Force. Not preoccupied according to paragraph 01/7576 directions from Siwa that East out of reality of the moment. I have given direct orders to Giordano for logistical inflow" ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾,

and arranged that 5th Air Fleet to struck it without stopping and without respite el-Barrani and the concentrations of armored units on the track Bir el Chreigat-Der el Brug-Der el Harnra. The new orders of the Command of the 10th Army were in harmony to the ideas of the supreme commander. The Bergonzoli column ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ had to accelerate the collection of its own forces and, passed the Libyan divisions, to aim with maximum speed and decision at Sidi el-Barrani, gravitating at the coast; reaching the objective, he had to execute thrusts in each direction in order to increase the psychological advantage on the enemy. The Libyan group had to continue the movement towards east leaving cleared road and tracks for their move ahead of the motorized group. The divisions *Marmarica* [62nd] and *Cirene* [63rd], finally, had the task to remain in place pre-positioning rapid units in order to contrast any eventual enemy action (sketch n. 7).

For all the day of the 15th Graziani bombarded Berti with messages, that in spite of the maneuver, that for his rapidity would have also had to enjoy the distressing slowness factor -in truth just excessive hope -was carried out with desolating slowness "frustrating effects, surprised, even reversal", as Graziani complained ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾. In truth the things were not at all simple. An advance not strongly hindered by the enemy can have a fast place on the condition that the departure situation is orderly. Instead we have seen hesitations of operating intentions and therefore a succession of conflicting orders, changes of assignments of units with consequent difficulties that could have been avoided with greater initial clarity of ideas, a little care of organization taken with sensitive repercussions in the preparation of the units formation. The tasks that at 20:00 hrs of the 14th Gen. Maletti telegraphed to the Army Command to deploy only a battalion, two incomplete groups of artillery and some smaller units

The advance on Sidi el-Barrani (15-16 September)



and requesting to "*considering this abnormal situation*" ⁽¹¹⁰⁾. And is also from observation how the command organization appeared rather disputable. Bergonzoli had the task to perform with two distinct blocks of forces: the first, motorized, had to run on Sidi el-Barrani under his personal guidance; the other, dismounted, had to remain on the embankment for protection of the passes and, implicitly, Bardia. Consequently, while this last one would have finished being located excluded from the maneuver, the first one would have been in tightest contact with the Libyan divisions that moreover worked for the army and with which, therefore, the coordination never would have been timely. The momentary passage of the *Marmarica* [62nd] and the *Cirene* [63rd] under the command of the army, entrusting to Bergonzoli could, perhaps, be preferred the entire mass of forces for the operation: *23 Marzo* [1st CC.NN], the Maletti grouping, the Tank Regiment, the 1st and 2nd *Libyan*.

In any case, Geno Bergonzoli, received at 06:30 of the 15th the orders of the army, convened at Halfaya the unit commanders and gave at once oral dispositions for the performance of the movement. He meant to proceed mounted on the two guiding tracks, the coastal and Bir el-Gib, but not being able to line up the *23 Marzo* [1st CC.NN] and the Maletti grouping for wing, because of the delay of this last (still incomplete), adopted a line disposition, articulating the Camicie Nere Division [1st CC.NN] in two columns. To the right (Consul General Olivas) of the 233rd CC.NN. legion and the 1st Tank Regiment, which should follow the advance of the legion moving towards the exposed flank ⁽¹¹¹⁾. On the left (Lt. General Antonelli) of the 219th CC.NN. legion and the divisional artillery. They followed the headquarters of the XXIII Corps. and the troops of the Army Corps. The Maletti group, at its arrival, had to take place behind the column on the left. Meeting resistance the column arrested to frontally engaged the enemy, developing a strong fire action; the other column would have turned the flank of the adversary but for their falling back. The movement from the positions of Sollum and Halfaya was slow, laborious and painful. From the British side therefore the difficulties were described:

"(...) especially during the attack from the escarpment, the Italians endured strong losses. And heavily as they advanced, along the roads at the zig zag that they came down from the escarpment, arrived in range of our artillery fire, that we could see their trucks to explode when projects reached them.

The decent along the two tracks that came down from the escarpment has

had to represent for the Italians a period of horror, since, before retiring, we had mined them, so making them dangerous with other means, while, for their part, the R.A.F. and the artillery maintained them under constant fire. When the mines exploded, the Italian troops were forced to dismount from the immobilized trucks and to come down on foot along the dangerous section, that produced congestion and confusion. And as the Italians laboriously continued in these conditions came fire of our artillery" ^{(112)*}.

The bottom of the track of at Halfaya, in particular, was all steps and fall offs, the steepest slope. To that the clogging produced from the units behind the forward Libyan divisions, they so in motion, and the difficulties added, for the motor vehicles, to exit outside the track without running the risk of bogging down. Bypassing of the Libyans had happened, finally, between 10:30 and 11:30 on the Bir Tishdida-Bir el Gib line, but the awful road conditions persisted. Not only had the English produced numerous interruptions, but they had literally devastated the great coastal artery and, in order to add to the difficulty of the work of repair, scattered mines in the ruins resulting from the destructions. The first trucks journeyed without many difficulties, but successive, the overloaded of troops and weapons, dropping inside the street plan. The arriving, thinking there was sufficiently solid lateral land, were themselves risking; dealing with nevertheless through the *sebca* marsh (coastal pond) or sand dunes to pebbles, and they became one after the other bogged down or sinking until the axles. Unavoidably, they had to follow each other with congestion and delays, which they added to the stops provoked the fire from the enemy of batteries concentrated especially on the left column. The evening of the 15th two of Bergonzoli's columns paused about ten kilometers beyond Bug Bug. The troops at the head had covered some thirty kilometers; there remained as many until to Sidi el-Barrani. The 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN], only major unit entirely motorized (450 motor vehicles), was feeling [negative] -like any other unit in those circumstances -lacking training in the field of the movement and the tactical employment. They -Bergonzoli wrote in his report - "*have shown themselves in battle not like a motorized unit but like troops affected as best they can to mount and to dismount from the motor vehicles*. Berti ordered the continuation of the advance for dawn of the following day: Bergonzoli at the front, without waiting for elements of Maletti still behind, Gen. Gallina in the second rank:

*There is no footnote #113 in the original text

with the Libyan divisions. The morning of the 16th Graziani, that had seen vanish the hope the Regiment would reach the objective before the precedent evening, "well right now distrusting of the momentum of his Ecc. Berti, take decisively in the direction of movement" ⁽¹¹⁴⁾ and gave rise to a bombardment of orders and solicitations to the army.

Bergonzoli had moved at the first light of dawn. Also he had constituted a small fast group with motorcyclists, 47mm. and 65mm. guns in order to take advantage of any favorable occasion but the provision will be demonstrated useless because, closed by road blocks, the tactical group will simply follow the left column. This was before being engaged: precise artillery fire, rapid, centered forced their movement to slow down more without means of transport proceeding on foot for some sections. Bergonzoli, than from the aerial observation squadron, had news detailed enough on the English artillery and armored units that were opposing them, contacted Lt. Gen. Antonelli towards 10:30 and "*I admire our close approach towards the sea, advance together -he wrote in the report -also the enemy artillery, appears to be employed in a superb way*" ⁽¹¹⁵⁾, then, seeing the arrival of the trucked elements of the Maletti, ordered Antonelli to resume the movement forcing the passage and headed towards the right column. Soon after, towards 13:00, arrived Col. Sorrentino by aircraft. He was the bearer of a message from Graziani for Bergonzoli: *the Armored division is withdrawing from Bir Enba towards the east and from Bir el-Dam towards Nezuat el-Matamir. Therefore you do not have ahead but a few rearguard elements. Attack them decidedly at once and overwhelm them. Sidi el-Barrani must be occupied in the least time*" ⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

Sorrentino showed the dispatch to Antonelli inducing him to leave again. At the same time the right column, that he stretched to the east of Sidi el-Barrani, after a relatively slow march because of the sandy ground and a large deviation towards south completed to avoid the fire of the enemy, arrived towards 13:00 in proximity of the town, made to feel the weight of its threat and forcing the last British units to withdraw in a hurry. At 13:30 all the marching order was in motion towards the east and at 14:45 the Antonelli column entered Sidi el-Barrani, undisturbed ⁽¹¹⁷⁾, while the Olivas column reached the coast four or five kilometers to east of the town.

The evening of the 16th the Italian deployment was as follows: to east-Southeast of Sidi el-Barrani the 23 *Marzo* [1st CC.NN] with all the artillery of

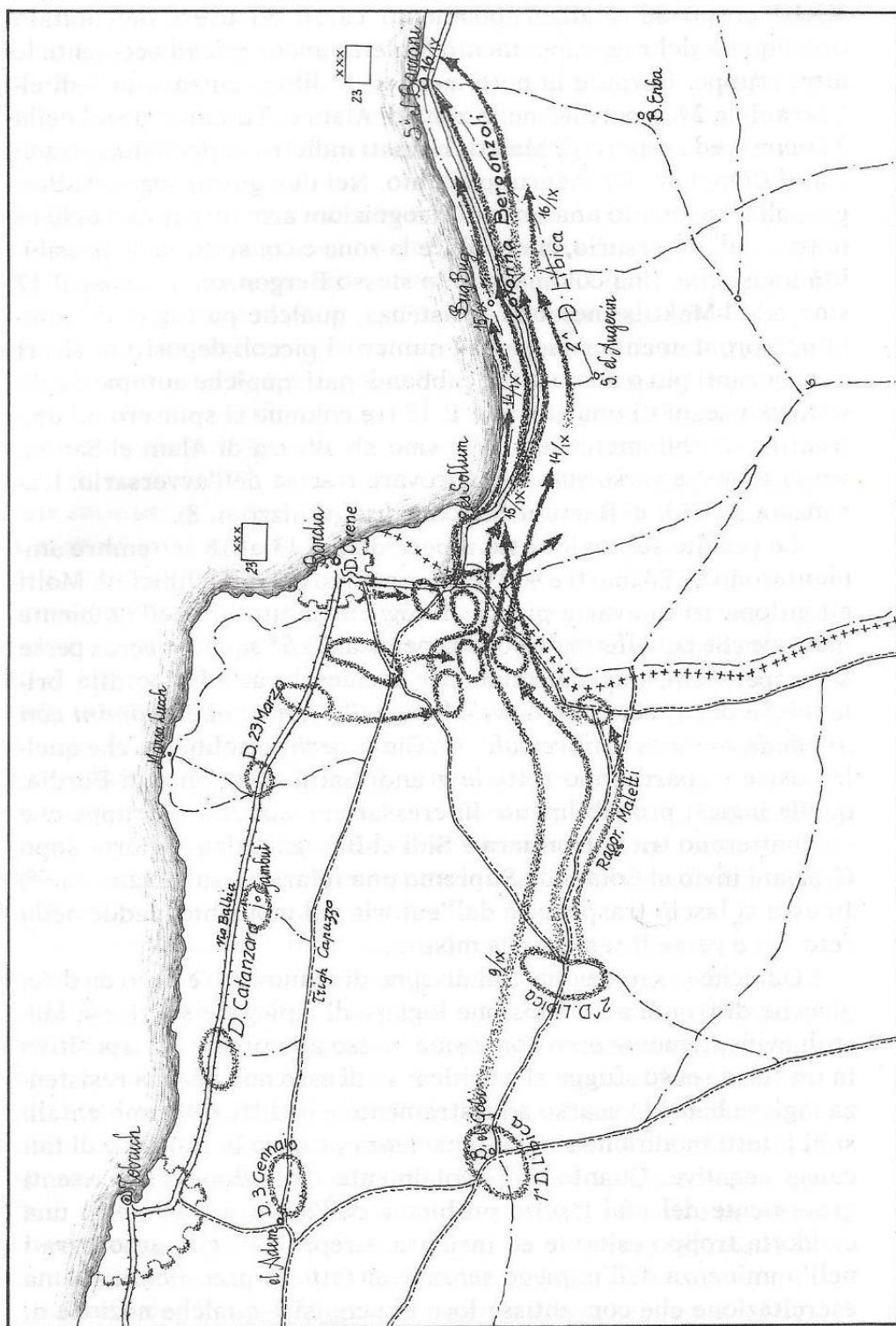
XXIII Corps and the Tank Regiment; to the west the town a part of the Maletti grouping; still more to the West the other troops. During the night the 1st *Libyan* entered Sidi el- Barrani, the 2nd was moving to the area of Alam el-Tummar, to the south the 23 *Maroz* [1st CC.NN], and the remaining units of the Maletti behind were rejoined the Command of the group. In the following two days Bergonzoli put in action a series of armed recognitions in order to collect news on the enemy, to control the area and see to the logistic problems. A column with the same Bergonzoli pushed the 17th until to el-Maktila: no resistance, some patrols of armored cars ready retreating, numerous small depots of provisions and fuels abandoned more or less intact, some destroyed motor vehicle: the signs of a withdraw. The 18th three columns pushed some thirty kilometers towards the east until to the height of Alam el-Samm, towards southeast and south without finding trace of the enemy. The advance on Sidi el-Barrani was concluded (sketch n. 8).

The losses endured in the entire period from the 13th to the 18th of September amounted to 120 died and the 410 wounded, a third of which was Libyans ⁽¹¹⁸⁾. Many the motor vehicles were damaged more for the strain endured in that natural atmosphere that for effect of enemy attack. The 5th Air Fleet lost six aircraft, two of which by various accidents. The British losses announced by Wavell were "*less than 50 men with a modest number of vehicles*" ⁽¹¹⁹⁾. Useful but to emphasize that those numbers regarded all our major units to east of Bardia, those English probably interested only the troops that fought between the frontier and Sidi el-Barrani. Some days latter Graziani sent a report the Comando Supremo on the advance ⁽¹²⁰⁾. In it he wrote from the euphoria of the moment: fell in rhetoric and lost a sense of proportion.

Some observations: On the maneuver design there is little to saying now that on the front to the English decision to retire on Marsa Matruh evidently it was not put to the test. The disposition in a clear sense escapes the critic: on it he did not weigh the English resistance but the insufficient training and the environmental difficulties; he just accorded at once to fact modifications them from the departure such negative causes. As to the carrying out of the action, it suffered severe headaches solved problem of trucking and conducted too hesitant and insecure. The units were trucked in the run-up of use without having previously done any exercise that would allow them to acquire some notion of troop movement technique and tactics of motorized units.

Schizzo n. 8

**L'AVANZATA SU SIDI EL BARRANI
DIVISIONE D'INSIEME DELLE OPERAZIONI (13-16 settembre 1940)**



The drivers, scraped together from everywhere, arriving in the days immediately preceding the offensive, could not feel a tie to the unit. They did not have even minimal training for combat and much less a convenient moral education. There remained those that were: more or less able drivers, not soldiers; and in the test of the fire they manifested their inexperience. They caused unjustified stops, errors of direction, delays to resume place in the convoy and to set off again in the right direction. The resumption of the movement after the consequent leaving the vehicle for the enemy attack was always extremely laborious. The motor vehicles, that arrived, even those at the last moment, coming from various agencies, of the varied types, some little adapted to proceed in dune terrain, others already worn out by their previous work, then developed important deficiencies at the first hard task. Bergonzoli put all that in evidence in the own report, asking for in the future good motor vehicles, drivers assigned to the units employing them or at least linked to them from communal living or organic truck companies. In any case -he wrote -it was apart from the system adopted in order to reach Sidi el-Barrani: the improvisation of the convoys. On the conduct of the operation there weighed the insufficiency of radio connections, the difficulties to make to changes to orders by couriers, especially at night, to units located in imprecise areas, through territory of recent occupation and not completely sure. But beside these disadvantages of an operating nature, I must blame the uncertainties and the indecision of commanders of front to the enemy reaction.

Berti had three determining elements to the goal of the good resolution of the enterprise: the Maletti grouping ⁽¹²¹⁾, the *23 Marzo* [1st] CC.NN. Div. and the 1st Tank Regiment. They were determining because they were the only units in a position to move quickly. The first resulted in isolation from practice before the border to cause a collection of incidents that could have been avoided; the second one proceeded laboriously, its weakness was of the motorized mentality and specific preparation; the third was employed to protect the infantry rather than maneuver or as a breakthrough unit, at least. Wavell observed that in only one circumstance, 16 September, did the Italian Command try to employ the tanks in order to trap the British rearguard "*but also in this occasion their hesitation made a wreck of the attempts*".

The artillery was much more prominent capacity of adaptability: with tractors at the last moment improvised, and smart tractor drivers for the first time to perform the task of

to support and protect the motorized units in very difficult terrain for the observation of the shot, it *"was employed in audacious way, even in front of the forward troops"* ⁽¹²²⁾. It has been pointed out previously of a incorrect use of the aerial formations. The report must be extended also to the advance on Sidi el-Barrani. It was missing, it is right admit, most of the psychological preparation to the normality of an air attack; consequently the attitude, the training in the camouflage, dispersal, the reaction against the attack from the sky lacked. In the absence of an alert attitude, that would have been almost instinctive, matched the enemy aviation and obsession against it seemed to be only defense the constant presence of those friendly. It became unavoidable, given this state of mind and given the real difficulties in mechanized combat, a not always balanced appraisal of the demands of participation the for our aerial units. And equally unavoidable was the usury of the 5th Air Fleet did not find adapted compensation in the results achieved, turned out that they would have reached with minor waste of human energies and wear and tear on the aircraft. On the 13th of September Gen. Porro wrote to Gen. Pricolo:

"(...) Not accustomed, all these old colonial, to have aviation over head, do not admit that they can be injured and they want protection from dawn to the sunset. As you cannot send small formations (yesterday a patrol of English fighters, who were away to prevent to our bombers going far to the rear, were composed of 40 aircraft), as our flights may not be 3 or 4 a day, and in the intervals are trouble.

Any interception additions, demands big waves on big waves. If I met all the demands and orders, I would not have many aircraft by now. Aviation is the Turk head on which the responsibility of whichever unfavorable event is wanted to be unloaded and that satisfied the errors of the ground commanders. This night the Marshal has told me that the loaded Maletti column has been bombed and strafed. The Maletti intentionally did not bring with him his of A/A artillery battalion; He parked very close and not dispersed. But the guilt is all for the Air Force!

Today day in battle: to stand by Berti, I would have sent the ground attack to strafing and fragmentation bombed 16 targets and with the bombers 8 objectives and then I would have big waves after big waves to Marsa Matruh, where now always the fighters cruise. The demands are nagging and asphyxiating.

I try to resist and speak with everyone, but without success to convince; or, if they reach

sometimes to admit just our principles and my protests, at first everything, at the first alarm request, they ask, they expect, they insist (...) " ⁽¹²³⁾.

On the side, Bergonzoli's report, sound naturally in opposite tone: *The action of the Air Force, undoubtedly effective from the general point of view, does not appear adherent to the actions of the XXIII Army Corps*". Decidedly the inter-forces cooperation was in its primary steps.

Assuming everything-which obviously cannot fall back on the units -his legitimate emphasize on the force inadequacy as a operating instrument to reach an objective by a decisive course. The war in Africa was war of tanks. Without them and against them the problem became irresolvable. Not having prepared that they could achieve was shortsighted and limited strategic horizon.

In order to close, it is necessary to still speak about the action of command. The passionate engagement of Graziani is undeniable. From his command post near Cirene ⁽¹²⁴⁾, well-served by an efficient system of transmissions and trusted staff -the chief of general staff, Tellera; the assigned general, Miele; the head of the operations section, Col. Sorrentino -he took part, corrected, sped up, reproached. He was not himself sure that he had done well, consequences of the departure. An army commander, which Berti was, had the absolute head-on received the task, objective and forces to employ; the rest was his affair and naturally would have eventually answered for errors of orders. Respect of the hierarchical prerogatives was skipped. The examination of the addresses which the orders were issued from 9th to 16th September shows not only an excessive fluidity of the assignments, but above all also Berti, let happen the passing over of the intermediate levels, specifying the part to assign to the single divisions. It is not from the quite fact that the Commander of the XXI Corp, the person in charge of the advance on Sidi el-Barrani, on 28 August had almost been unexpectedly replaced by the one of the XXIII Corp, which they inherited it's divisions. The preference given to this person by Bergonzoli was obviously little justified much from the circumstances. The Commander of the XXI Corp himself moved in the rear, of the formation, and Gen. Dalmazzo was replaced in assignment by Gen. Spatocco, already commander of the *Cirene* [63rd] division. At the end of November the Commander of the XXI Army Corp will only return to a forward formation taking the old *Cirene* [63rd] and the new *Catanzaro* [64th].

From the British, there was taken place a curious divergence of opinions that was resolved in a healthy spirit of initiative. This being the case to make a comparison of the directives circulated from Churchill on 16th of August ⁽¹²⁵⁾, they reflected exactly the worries during the wait for the invasion "*on a massive scale*" of Egypt, with the decision of Wavell on the battlefield. Evidently the directives were based on the presumed force ratios and would only change in the second half of September. Therefore sped up movement to the region of the delta of the greater number of troops from Palestine (an English brigade, one Australian and one Polish), the recovery of some British battalions employed on the Nile and the channel with police tasks to profit of the garrison of Marsa Matruh, the arrival of new units from Great Britain (a armored brigade, a hundred guns of varied type), from the East Africa (part of the *Union Brigade*) and from India (a second Indiana division and three batteries). As far as the operating design, Churchill meant to earn time and to await the Italians on the organized defensive position on the height of Alexandria, where the entire army of the Nile would have given battle. Next to major reason, therefore, he did not think to engage in the Egyptian western desert with the troops available before the complete arrival of reinforces. Only exception to the falling back of the units of the *Western Desert Force* was the garrison of Marsa Matruh, that had to remain in place in order to effect actions against the long Italian line of communications. Wavell, summoned to London first of August, had presented to the chiefs of general staff his thought on the situation in North Africa. If the Italian attack had been made in force and with German Armored troops, the *Western Desert Force* would have had to carry out a withdraw to a certain extent. At that moment indications of German arrival did not exist, but given the deficiency of information on the enemy formations it was theoretically possible that within certain limits such inflow could be masked. They thought that the Italian mass, could not be more than four-five infantry divisions, would advance on a front of about eighty kilometers, overlooking the coastal direction and stretching to go around from south the entrenched field of Marsa Matruh.

In his opinion the logistic difficulties could be overcome, in a good part at least, thanks to the aerial superiority, whose contribution was estimated: 300-400 bombers, 300 fighters and 200 cargo planes were assumed available. Naturally the reinforcements of which Wavell had the most urgent need regarded the armored vehicles. 50 Matilda were already available, but uncertainty existed on moving them

through the Mediterranean or if transported along the route of the Cape of Good Hope. The first solution, supported by Churchill, stretched to use of Operation *Hats*, designed for the delivery of supplies to Malta and to Egypt, adding to the convoy four fast ships for the transport for the medium tanks, but it introduced the risk to lose the most precious material and to expose to serious damages the two naval formations, *Force H* and the *Mediterranean Fleet*, who had to harmonize the operation. The second one offered more safety, but also the danger to arrive too much late. Wavell, being questioned, pronounced for this last solution: no relief offensive could be carried out against the Sudan before the end of the great rains of October and if the Italians had attacked from the Libya he would have employed 7th Arm. Div. with greater lack of scruples and elasticity, awaiting the sure reinforcements, the final decision were deferred to 26 August, when all the shipment was committed to Gibraltar. After the 25th all three commanders in chiefs of the Middle East reported that indications of an imminent offensive by Graziani did not exist, the convoy with the tanks, that now numbered an entire brigade of three battalions, was started towards the front under the escort of the cruisers *York* and *Ajax*, destined to remain in Egypt under the command of Cunningham, As for the air force, Great Britain considering the difficulties to quickly constitute new groups (deficiency of trained personnel and aircraft), had decided first of all to equip with modern aircraft the existing groups in the Middle East. He had therefore realized a quick program that would have resulted in the modernization by the end of September of five groups of medium bombers, three of fighters, and one of bomber/transport for a total of 84 Blenheim IV, 60 Hurricane, 12 Wellington. Moreover 24 Hurricanes were destined to the South African air force and 150 Glenn Martin bombers, coming from a previous French order from the United States, to be divided between the Middle East and South Africa.

When the troops of the 10th Army began the advance on Sidi el-Barrani, Wavell, had formed a much more precise idea on the dimensions of the impending danger, established to limit the withdraw to Marsa Matruh. So that Gen. O' Connor left to one delaying echelon the mobile contrast of the enemy columns, positioned in front of the entrenched field a defensive battle in which his tanks for how much reduced of number would have had a good game before the few Italian M 11 tanks (the light tanks do not deserve to be taken in to consideration) and then the infantries

infantry on foot. In short O'Connor dearly played his *atouts** -but for little good -however it does not seem to be supported to have to acquit an impossible task: fight up to Marsa Matruh and not allowing them to refuse to fight; he succeeded very well, also since Graziani did not have the minimal intention to arrive at Marsa Matruh.

4. THE PAUSE AT SIDI EL BARRANI.

As soon as reaching the objective, Graziani hurried to communicate to the Comando Supremo the occupation of Sidi el-Barrani which marked the maximum limit of the first phase for a multitude of reasons: the required equipment has still not arrived if only not in part; the troops, especially the Libyan divisions, had an absolute need of reorganizing; the flow of the supplies had to be started in a regular basis since nothing existed in the area, not even the water because of the burial of the wells operated by the English. This entailed first road accommodation by Sollum and Sidi el-Barrani, reducing the preexisting track to an unusable condition. It began therefore a long new period of pause, punctuated, with little clarity of relationships between Rome and Cirene, by hesitations, orders and hesitations.

Certainly the logistical problem had worsened. There is no doubt that against the two contenders, the Italian was the one against whom the desert still retained its heavy and conditioning hesitation. Unfortunately, we must also admit that supplies to North Africa did not benefit an organization starting at 'height of the moment and that the results did not correspond to the goodwill. Apart from the question of Malta, down to the summit a convenient predictive power. Failure to timely upgrade of Libyan ports, especially Tobruk⁽¹²⁶⁾, constituted an error paid dearly, as will Valona and Durazzo**. Although shipments were encountered unacceptable drawbacks. Towards the end of June Balbo asked the intervention of Badoglio because the arrival of 74 cannons 47/32, as expected, it was found that 18 of them could not be mounted for not matching registration numbers between the various parts of the whole and which, moreover, they were missing 49 tracking instruments. Ultimately the guns used were reduced to 25: a third of those who came, again: when you receive a lot of armor-piercing 20 mm, it was found that

*French for trump card

** Ports in Albania which were used during the invasion of Greece

none of them was armor-piercing and that, in exchange, there was armor-piercing rounds for the 65 mm. not requested. It can still be cited the shipment of radios without batteries, pigeon coops without pigeons, etc. Naturally hitches of this sort are unfortunately normal enough in war, under all latitudes, but in this case the observation assumes importance since the shipments concerned quantitative a very limited amount of materials. In fact the General Staff of the Army at once contacted the General directorate offices, even if "*perhaps a livelier tone would not have been inopportune*", as commented by the head of cabinet of the ministry for war in a note with said news to Soddu of the circular from Roatta.

The first offensive movement had immediately put to the test the logical system in Africa. Tripoli was the main port of disembarkation; from it they fed via sea the bases of Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk and (with motor-sail boats) Bardia, constituent in practice links of the logistic chain beyond the support of the nearby units. From Benghazi when it was in action also a flow of supplies and evacuations via ground. From Tobruk at the front the organization it was an Deputy intendant, than from the end of August he began to increase to the maximum the logistics center of Bardia and to constitute an advanced center at the Fort Capuzzo. Largely, therefore, the greater part of the apparatus of the Intendancy was at Benghazi and Derna, the one of medium size at Tobruk and Ain el-Gazala (an auxiliary center for fuel and explosives disembarkation) and the remainder at Bardia and Capuzzo. The staggering inventories not resulted in certain rates; in any case they are indicative for the average ship unloaded in the period 21 August-20 September:

At Tripoli and Benghazi, arrived from Italy 40,000 tons.

Loaded and under way to the Eastern ports 30,000 tons.

At Derna, arriving from Tripoli and Benghazi 10,000 tons.

At Tobruk, arriving from Benghazi 20,000 tons

At Bardia, arriving from Tobruk 5,000 tons³.

Of the 25,000 tons unloaded at Tobruk and Bardia is necessary to add 21,000 tons sent by highway transportation. On the whole, Bardia received two thirds of what was sent to the district quartermaster for the support of the offensive, both in the amassing phase and during action ⁽¹²⁷⁾. This organization had, as it has been said, was reordered and developed and the Comando Supremo agreed on such necessity shown at once by Graziani, indeed

he specified that "eagerness" did not exist about the resumption of the advance on Marsa Matruh.

While the rearrangement of the 10th Army with the goal of fighting in Egypt and was very worrying, for the supreme commander of Libya, Rome looked to Tunisia with increasing desire, also if the uncertain internal situation of the French colonies provoked doubts on the behavior of the local authorities would have assumed the fore front for an annexation or an occupation from the Italian side. However the advantage was undeniable that the possession of the Tunisian ports would have brought the Mediterranean transports, after the difficulties constituted by the greater length of the land distance along the African coast appeared easily overcome -and plans of regarding this already had been prepared by the General Staff of the Army -sending in there, with the first convoys, a consistent number of motor vehicles, joining together the Tunisian railroads with the Zuara- Tripoli line and organizing a costal service. Reasons of various kinds moreover existed. On 8 August Gen. Marras had written from Berlin that in a talk with Keitel, who had just that day, the head of the OKW had expressed some appreciations that represented the unofficial thought of Germany. In regard to France he had alluded to its obvious double game: it was compliant in the metropolitan territory, but it manifested a hostility hidden in the colonies in the attempt to hold a door opened towards Great Britain, for the case that it resisted. It was also certain that France in North Africa hid great quantity of arms and completing the materials arriving from the United States it was not known where the events in North Africa could create a serious surprise, especially the course of operations in Egypt, "*Germans confidence that Italy exercised an active contro!*" it is very much "*up to Italy to define this situation*". For the recorded, the Italian government had yet to establish the extent of French forces to be authorized for North Africa ⁽¹²⁸⁾. With this order in mind on 7 September Badoglio decided that their Chief of Staff of the Army examined, for an eventual future action against Tunisia, the decline in efficiency of the 5th army. The question was *the will of God*, its true, but the news was given to Graziani just at the same time as the order to attack towards Sidi el Barrani and in a form that a clear account of the complained difficulties did not hold, rightly or wrongly, for the supreme commander: " For every event I intend to soon return *the Fifth Army to efficiency. Dates change to Garibaldi to telegraph how' much is necessary to him*" ⁽¹²⁹⁾.

On the 12th of September Badoglio determined an further step forward in

development of the studies: the alignment for emergency E (East) had to be completed by the end of October, rather than by the 20th, so as to be in a position to profiting by the internal confusion of Yugoslavia, Mussolini probable thought of a short expiration; the order for emergency G (Greece), meant to occupy Ciamuria and Corfù eventually, had to be quickly done within the course of a month; the hypothetical occupation of Tunisia was entrusted to the 5th army, whose completion would be begun after the end of September "*when that is to say the movements for Albania are completed*" and whose reinforcements with one or more divisions had to be considered also under the outline of the directed disembarkation of a major unit in Tunisia. The plans had to be written up on the base of the forecasts of the General Staff of the Army, which it would also have to minister the emanation of directives to the Comando Superiore Armed Forces North Africa ⁽¹³⁰⁾. It would be useless to return to the issue of the dispersion of the efforts instead concentrating every possibility on the Libyan-Egyptian arena, if he did not take into account to observe as Badoglio hurried to indicate the start of the completion of the 5th Army in term with the requirements of Albania, rather than to assume as a point of reference the fate of the offensive towards Marsa Matruh. This negligence seems to point not towards the only active theater of operations -but that it would be simply be absurd to think -to consider the events that seem characteristic of the historical moment crossed by Italy: something between passive obedience to Mussolini and the fatalistic giving up to destiny. The same Graziani, that now in Africa was debating in distresses, cannot admit free from criticism in this regard.

On the 25th of September Badoglio again convened the chiefs of the General Staff for to dwell on the situation in the Mediterranean and, more precisely, on the prospect as Great Britain, mindful of the possible action Hispanic-German against Gibraltar, tried to buildup some other base in the western Mediterranean: Corsica or Biserta. Not that he had estimated a concrete possibility from the English of a realistic enterprise of the sort and thought, but evidently the none occupation of the two bases weighed in many senses on Italy. It was therefore the case of studying the features for to carry out when politically convenient or strategically necessary. For Corsica plans already existed, therefore he was simply dealing with the need to calculate the time being necessary to requisition the cargo vessels need. For Biserta it was to discarding the idea of proceeding from Tripolitania because of the calculation of the materials

and means demands in order to deliver to the location the 5th Army were alarming: the restoration in efficiency of major unit involved a lapse of time of three months. Disembarkation with troops located in Sicily remained the one alternative. Probably there would not have been resistance, since the fortifications of the city were in the process of being dismantled, and because the amount of force authorized by the Armistice Commission was supposed to have the Tunisia percentage minor, however it was good to study carefully the operation.

As far as the Libyan-Egyptian arena, Badoglio saw the following line programmatic, previous agreement with the Germany: action on Gibraltar in order to remove that support to the English fleet; otherwise our being left in Marmarica to move near to the port of Alexandria, towards Marsa Matruh and perhaps still more to the east; an participation of two air forces, Italian and German, from Marmarica on Alexandria in order to render untenable that port. If we render the life in the port of Alexandria impossible, Badoglio said, the British fleet more could probably not remain in the Mediterranean, for against it would have had to cross the Suez Canal, and, consequently, Egypt would have been abandoned. In the light of these considerations, Roatta had *"to assume to appear with all calm"* of the joint telegram of Graziani on the inherent necessities the organization of new operating phase ⁽¹³¹⁾ and *"to see what we can make in order to put Graziani in the best conditions, as we have always made [!]"*. Then pointed out the aid of Germany:

"The Germans have offered two armored divisions. Roatta, had quickly studied the issue, inasmuch as for transport of a single armored division three months will be necessary. We must keep in mind we have an abundance of men and that these men in Africa that are superior to the German soldiers.

Therefore, if I will have to deal with the issue ⁽¹³²⁾, will deal mostly for the cession of materials and not of men. Instead I cannot say: given your aircraft entrusted to ours: here they would never give them. For aviation therefore it will probably be a matter of organic units" ⁽¹³³⁾.

Decidedly modern conception lacked an armored arm. Preceding from the inopportune comparison of the soldier element, it is true that, organizing the 10th army with men in abundance, it appeared rational, beyond that humanly comprehensible,

ask only the material, however in these circumstances, where you had to fight not only against the enemy but also against the clock, were not taken into account three serious deficiencies in Italy. The tank and the Bersaglieri were not individually prepared technical and tactical use of medium tanks and foreign halftracks-incidentally, it was also highly questionable adequacy of training received for M 11 and M 13 -especially if relatively sophisticated; the commanders and units did not have specific war experience of the Germans; Finally, commanders relied on a doctrine of tepid employment and substantially support the infantry: too little for the war in the desert!

It was the first time that Badoglio sketched a plan of offensive war, but the strategic concept was halfway between the sketch and the doubt. The idea to reach Marsa Matruh, or slightly beyond, to eliminate the base of Alexandria with the joint axis air forces would think such a waiver to the objective of the canal, but frankly the thought of achieving the ultimate goal in the way that object appears so devoid of solid foundations to induce you to believe that maybe he hoped not necessary Badoglio stretch so the arm of the offensive and thus not necessary the terrestrial competition of the Germans. Moreover, at that time, even Hitler- whose attention was shifting towards the U.S.S.R. -seemed to be content to simply improve the Italian position in Egypt without pointing to the canal.

Who believed necessary to achieve this was Graziani, however more or less everyone was now clear that merely arriving at Suez Canal would have resolved the fight in North Africa. Even now though it was concretely planned an operation like that with the determination of the necessary means, with a wide-ranging breath, the resolution of later phases, with the participation of the three Armed Forces in harmonic execution of the effort. Perhaps withdrew all from the front of an enterprise that appeared outside of our capacity, seemed to ask in the preparations for too much time and demanded materials not available. If this assumption is correct, it should be said that the force of character and will lacked. The three cited facts, deterrents don't hold up. At the bottom also on part of the Comando Supremo the canal had been accepted as the arrival point and, for converged, alternative did not exist if not attended the passive defense in Cyrenaica in..., the English decided to attack, the time, time was passing as if flowed in our favor: in practical only to Sidi el-Barrani, after 150 kilometers of advance, the

Comando Superiore N.A. began the study of how much would have been necessary in order to reach Marsa Matruh. It is more difficult to accept the thesis that in the two previous months are not possible the assessment of needs, as well as that they were refer to a territorial objective, and the amassing of much available in Italy and Libya. Their basis to bring to mind the business was being allowed to collapse the occasion to send strong quantitative of materials to North Africa, taking advantage of the availability of merchant ships and limited offensive activity of the *Mediterranean Fleet*.

That overseas supplying was a serious and weighty problem. The potential of the African ports recognized in the studies carried out by the plans office of the General Staff of Navy concurred influx and the contemporary unloading: at Tripoli of five cargo ships and four for transport troops, at Benghazi and Tobruk of three cargo ships and two for transport troops, with the ability to disembark a 1,000 men to the hour and unload 2,000 tons a day at Tripoli, approximately the half at Benghazi and less still at Tobruk. These actual capacity in peacetime, did not correspond to the circumstances in war because of the unavoidable airstrikes and naval bombardment, as of the first half of 1941 the possibilities of Tripoli will be reduced of 50%. At Benghazi, then, for good part of 1940 and nearly all 1941 was not considered cost-effective to send convoys consisting of large steamships mole for port failures⁽¹³⁴⁾. In the months of July, August and September 1940 the unloading in the Libyan ports exceeded 50,000 tons monthly, where, even without any major port works, you could reach 70-80.000 tons. Also the uncertainties was the constitution of the convoys had their weight, even though if relative as the throttling in the flow of the supplies were taken place to the unloading ports. However, early August, believing that he had met most of the demands of Libya (!), the Supreme Command had made the decision to renounce the system of convoys, involving evident risks for the R. Marina, and to carry out, in principle, it sent with pairs of ships on the Trapani to Cape Bon coastal route of Tunisia - Tripoli ports of Cyrenaica.

But it was a matter also of organization. It was not the only issue to unload quickly to advantage of the army. It was necessary above all a regulation of the traffic between the Mother Country and Libya and for this purpose the responsibilities were very evidently not defined. To the end of September the participation of the top-down action was prevailed in order to eliminate the nuisance repeatedly reported by the Comando

Superiore N.A. and the harmful repercussions that they had on the flow of supplies. The slowness in the unloading operations of the ships, the extended waits of empty ships, the permanence in port of ships not really necessary provoked to an excessive congestion of the African ports ⁽¹³⁵⁾. Consequently, the Supreme Command established that they were of relevance of the G.S.R.M. themselves the departure and the convoying of the destined steamboats for the supplying of Libya, as well as the convoying and of the ships returning to Italy; and that of the Comando Superiore N.A. by themselves, through the Comando Superiore Marina for Libya, the Libyan traffic between the various the ports and anchorages ⁽¹³⁶⁾. At the same time it decided that the mercantile ships in service along the African coasts were not of suitable tonnage, speed and consumption were properly replaced. Except that, after a pair of weeks the situation supplied by the Direzione Superiore Trasporti of the G.S. of the Army was to indicate that things still did not go as wished: in the ports of the peninsula they were stopped ten very loaded steamboats, some of which themselves from the 29 September. Badoglio again met with Graziani, in short order to emphasize certain lack of energy and care in dealing with and resolving the issue. Knowing that Adm. Turr had been sent to Libya just for such problem, concluded rather flatly:

"I therefore restrict me to recommend that the resolution is the fastest possible (...).It is defined with all urgency a tightly unified organization that makes the General Governor of the Libya, Comandante Superiore of the Armed Forces of the I.N.A. and to him only" ⁽¹³⁷⁾,

and to good account the next day found way to stress that ready flow of the materials of the every kind *"that were assigned to you here with the greater possible liberality and every more loving care"* was subject to organize transport and ports. *"This problem on which I drew your attention and several times and that I recommend once again to face squarely and solve adequately"* ⁽¹³⁸⁾. One of the major drawbacks consisted in the unloading of the steamship at Tripoli, with the successive one transfer of the materials on motor vehicles for the continuation of its journey. Unfortunately it seemed that the relative difficulties to the diversion on Benghazi of the ships with cargos destined for Cyrenaica were not easy practiced, Benghazi being constantly

constantly kept under aerial bombardment and deprived of advanced harbor equipment for the necessities of three or four ships.

With regard to means being necessary for a decisive offensive, those determining were the tank and the trucks. For the first, the German co-operation was in a position to overwhelming the existing qualitative difference between the Italian tanks and those of the British and indeed to overturn it to our favor. For the second, it is noted that he himself was dealing with a very large problem. However it is to observe a strange unease, would say themselves, from Badoglio on this argument. On 25 September, just the day of the meeting of the chiefs of general staff, the operations section of the Comando Supremo put in evidence, in an internal memo to maintain emergency E the shipment of trucks overseas had been much limited, to the point that the same Graziani -which noted the situation -had always tried to reduce his own demands. This had reached a paradox that gives from 10 June to 15 September more trucks had been sent to Albania (945) than to North Africa (1,031 proportionally, of which but 200 burnt in port). Now the moment to supply an immediate and remarkable effort in favor of Libya seemed reached. There existed in Italy approximately 20,000 trucks ⁽¹³⁹⁾, of which at least 6,000 were heavy, the type that is to said being necessary in Africa. Using good part of the necessary could be supplied to Graziani in order to arrive to Marsa Matruh but also at Alexandria and to not only complete the 5th Army in a period of less than three months. With that the efficiency of the metropolitan army would have been temporary reduced, but the General understandings seemed acknowledged. Probably the contemporary reinforcement of the 10th and the 5th Armies could not be considered realistic (at least the 15-20% of the trucks had to be considered unserviceable or in repair, and collecting the means and personnel in all the peninsula was not surely a simple thing) however the thought of Badoglio, which expressed in the cited meeting of that morning and in the order send to the General Staff of the Army same day ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾, just does not seem to reflect the will to impress impulse, decision and quickness to the putting to point of the offensive planned for Egypt.

Graziani, meanwhile, had been summoned to Rome for a guideline on the General situation and for a examination of the development to give to the operations. The morning of the 29th was approached by Badoglio, with which he admitted that for the first half of December he would have been in a position to resuming the offensive with the support of a sufficient logistic apparatus, and entirety went to the palazzo Venezia ⁽¹⁴¹⁾. Mussolini listened in silence

the presentation of Graziani, then, with rather detached tone, observed:

"The month of July gave us the British Somaliland, September Sidi el-Barrani, October will give us Marsa Matruh this will allow us to move forward our aviation that will then be able to push the bombardment on Alexandria. Marsa Matruh itself is not a name, but what I care about is us to process first. On the other hand I wouldn't ever fix on territorial objectives. Consequently these guidelines you will be able to resume their march towards the middle of October " ⁽¹⁴²⁾.

Badoglio intervened immediately claiming inability to organize themselves in such a short time, then Mussolini asked the opinion of greater interest. "*Answering* - he later wrote Graziani - *I can clarify the terms until after he returned to home and looked at all sides of the issue The Duce not responding*" ⁽¹⁴³⁾. Little encouraged by the coldness of Mussolini, but absolutely incomprehensible the elusiveness of Graziani. It transpires from his diary, he was not supported by Badoglio and evidently preferred not to deal directly with Mussolini, but you can't admit the shyness of a Marshal of Italy, Army Chief of staff, especially about a theater of operations he was personally responsible. On the other hand he vented with Ciano ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾. Who personally, had just returned from Berlin where she had been signed the military alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan, had conferred with Mussolini after the interview with the two marshals and I had found stretched out to try for Italy "*a success that would give you the glory sought in vain for three centuries*" ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾, but it also had the intention to attack in mid-October and the irritation of Badoglio, who was speaking to "delay" the march on Marsa Matruh. Ciano therefore took the opportunity of the visit of Graziani for feeling the ground – in fact Mussolini had just told him to let him know the true thought of top commander-and felt that no resumption of action was considered achievable before mid-December, pose a significant question: "*what if Duce gave the order to move?*" Graziani answered drastically he would refuse, at the risk of coming across something in the meshes of the military penal code, or obeyed blindly, to risk a defeat that would not have been responsible; However begged him to represent to Mussolini that nothing was overlooked to speed up, adding that if he had to

to send to the Comando Supremo documents of grave importance some of which he would have also transmitted copies to him for personal delivery into the hands of the head of government ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾. Funny interview.

The conversation with Ciano happened on 1 October. Only on 5 October Graziani - detained in Rome by adverse meteorological conditions to fly back and to be present at the predicted dispositions of Mussolini -succeeded in speaking with Soddu, without, in truth, receiving much solace. The only precise indication was that the reinforcement materials were sent as far as possible, because emergency E absorbed 850,000 men and 25,000 motor vehicles. Graziani remained without speaking, but frankly such astonishment leaves one very perplexed. He knew very well the planning; right on October 1, Roatta communicated to the interested Command the formal approval of the chief of General staff of the Army of the emergency G directives; for the four days he was in Rome: consequently, it was never possible that Roatta had some hidden knowledge, that he was brought current of the main issues on the table -as he periodically did -and not of the modernization of the plans? Most likely Graziani, clearly uncomfortable at the top of the army, created the impression that they had taken big decisions without knowledge, and damaging to the African theater of operations, but we know that he decided nothing and that Rome was proceeding according to the impulses coming from the palazzo Venezia. A comment on a situation of similar embarrassment is quite superfluous. It's all too obvious inferiority complex of Graziani in atmospheres of the High Command is much too obvious and must also admit the existence of a psychological depression of the marshal in order to try to comprise his painful acceptance of things - which rightly or wrongly he considered intentional - intolerable for anyone.

In the evening of the 5th Mussolini reached a decision. The previous day at Brennero he had been to meet with Hitler, then had reported the events at the Rocca of the Caminate, near Forlì, from where a report designed for Badoglio of the arguments examined in the talks with the ally: the resignation of Chamberlain, index of internal crisis, perhaps to herald crisis of other favorable events for us; possibility that Germany was resolved to treat the peace with the Petain government, in order to attract France into the anti-British coalition; the suspension of the foreseen invasion of England to wait for a more favorable time; greater engagement by Hitler attributed to the area of the Mediterranean and therefore his offer of armored troops, offered for the moment declined

but to keep in mind for the conclusive phase of the race to the Nile. The note was in quick order delivered to Graziani. The directives for further development of the operations in Egypt were condensed into nine points:

- "1. The Sidi Barrani was a brilliant tactical success beyond dispute and an equally unquestionable political success as it resulted in a crisis in Egyptian Government and revealed a split in the country's political class.
2. Only with the capture of Marsa Matruh success from strategic and tactical will could have consequences even more importance from the political point of view.
- 3 the operation on Marsa Matruh must initiate within the 10-15 this month because it is my belief that the means at Graziani disposal currently are sufficient for the purpose and phase.
The effectives are *nearly untouched*. Clear superiority -at the present *moment* - of artillery, tanks, airplanes. Superiority in moral. All results from very interesting oral report of Graziani remains the logistical problem, which has a particularly serious aspect of the water. But in October water is necessary at the height of summer
4. The caterpillar* and the other demands of Graziani can be satisfied in the measure of the possible and will always reach in useful time if and for the moment in which we will have to engage the great battle on the Delta.
5. The desert temperature in October is tolerable for Italian troops currently trained, but it can be tough for people of the North or new people not yet trained.
6. It is my conviction that the British will defend Marsa Matruh except to the extent strictly necessary to delay our march and disengage their formations.
7. It is true that setting back the attack to November sends other material to Cyrenaica, but is equally true that in a equal and greater extent strengthen the English. It is by now demonstrated that who attacks cannot lose time.
8. We must render the Strait of Sicily so that nothing more reaches from the west, for the moment watertight that the activity of our aviation in East Africa, for reasons, cannot moderately to disturb the convoys that pass in the Red Sea.
9. Once at Marsa Matruh, we'll see which of the two pillars of the Mediterranean the English should defend must be pulled down: if Egyptian or Greek" ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾.

* Tracked Artillery tractors

Of these points, three appear particularly interesting. First, the conviction that Marsa Matruh would have been defended with a rearguard action, idea is absolutely lacking in a reasoned basis, making all think that the entrenched field of Marsa Matruh -where the S.I.M. marked the presence of one or two divisions -would have been a very hard bone if not just the hinge of a pitched battle for the larger British forces. Since the beginning of the war, in fact, the English had feverishly worked constructing emplacements in concrete, tank destroyer ditches, minefields and shelters; creating conspicuous water systems and accumulating heavy stocks. *"Marsa Matruh became, then, a city of troglodytes, as also we having there placed an immense system of shelters, as the incursions of Italian aircraft became more frequent, we lived underground more and more, so as to be able to carry out our work, nearly without interruption. The barracks for the troops as well as the Commander of company and other officers, as well as the hospitals and first aid stations for them, were all situated under a thick covering of sand as well as that, to an casual viewer, Matruh could appear like an abandoned village, while in truth fervently alive"* ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾. The entity of its garrison had endured oscillations, but, considering also the troops located in Egypt, it was not ever below force of one Italian binary division.

Secondly the affirmation of Mussolini, always with a personal conviction and against the opinion expressed by Badoglio, that the forces and means in Cyrenaica allowed the quick resumption of the offensive ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾. The assertion was difficultly disputable, not since elements to its favor already existed -as he himself soon emphasized as it was bizarre -but in how much it was not simple to openly refute the supreme commander, a lot invested on his own part to write up the directives alone and in contrast with the opinion of the chief of General Staff and avoiding, or refusing, even an accurate deepening of the issue. The decision to attack within 10 - 15 October could, instead, allow Graziani to resign immediately, given his persuasion not to be in a position to move at least before two months. But in the meeting of 30 September Graziani had not supported at once, Badoglio waiting, therefore the impossibility to resume the advance soon. He would have had to make him. He did not dare and take time. He thought then to act through Ciano, again mistaken and Mussolini was right again and took the opportunity: accepted for good course

evidently optimistic verbal description of the situation in North Africa, thought the irresolution of the marshal out of place, as it had been for Sidi el-Barrani. Reckless and overly emphatic official report of the advance in Egyptian territory was turned now against its compiler.

Third point of the directives, the continuation of operations after the conquest of Marsa Matruh: if against the Delta or "the Greek pillar". In that regard, to that probably Graziani was not very alarmed. He knew of the plan to update it because he had just approved; but he knew also that Joint Chief of Staff, General Staff of the Army and ministry of war were agree postponed *sine die** eventuality ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ and knew also of the decision to dismiss 600,000 men. There was however anything other that would have had to make Graziani jump. The directives of the head of government were accompanied by the following letter from Badoglio:

"I send to you a copy of a note from the Duce in the matter of the operations to develop for the occupation of Marsa Matruh.

As I informed the Duce, the Führer would be ready to give us the necessary means for our operations in Egypt.

The Duce, however, thinking our current means sufficient for the purpose, has declined the offer for the imminent second phase.

The German aid in trucks, tanks, stukas may be required when it will be decided to attack the English forces, that -according to the thought of the Duce - we wait to full or almost to the Delta",

As you can see, strangely did not drive but spoke of materials, in that, at least, he was not exact. It is very probably that Badoglio, when he transmitted the directives of Mussolini to Graziani, had not still seen the report of the Hitler-Mussolini talk, which, at least in the Italian version, it reports the argument in these terms:

"The Führer, noting that the Italians participated with air forces in the fight against the British islands, offers to the Duce the contribution of his specialized forces for the attack on Egypt. The Duce answers thanking and saying that he does not have need of any aid for the second phase of the offensive, while reserving to reintroduce the subject to the Führer as they could be useful for the third phase " ⁽¹⁵¹⁾.

*Latin meaning without assigning a day for a further meeting or hearing

However it was well known that the Germans had offered two armored divisions. For the time being will agree to examine the developments of Italian thought on the offensive in North Africa, reserving to return opportunely to the issue of German aid. Receiving the directives, Graziani reflects long if it wasn't opportune to ask to be relieved from command, then decided to postpone and answered that in the meeting at the Palazzo Venezia had shown the General conditions necessary in order the put into a effect a successful movement on Marsa Matruh and that, consequently, was not in a position to guaranteeing the resumption of the advance for the date fixed. In any case, leaving the next day he would have arrived at Cirene the 8th and, after having completed an on-site examination of the real availabilities, he counted on being able to supply a sufficiently approximate indication ⁽¹⁵²⁾. Just landed at Tripoli however he hurried to send to the Comando Supremo the situation of the material shipments, emphasizing that only at the end of October would the groups of 149/13 would be available they being necessary in order to attack the entrenchments of Marsa Matruh, the motor vehicles in order to transport part of the Libyan divisions and the towing trailers for the M 13 tanks ⁽¹⁵³⁾. Badoglio delivered two letters to Mussolini, reaching Rome on 12 October, and these asked when, after all, he was in anticipation of the beginning of the yearned for new movement: he was annoyed with Graziani and he did not hide having in mind replacing him. "*Naming generals Messe and Vercellino*" wrote Ciano in his diary ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾. However he did not show deep worry about Libya, in fact just the 13th he ordered that from the 26th all was ready for the invasion against Greece. The 15th October had a meeting at the Palazzo Venezia that agrees on the campaign of Greece. In the Egyptian arena it was cited but a single time on the aid that the British air forces of the Middle East could have supplied the Greeks. It was Badoglio who spoke, observing that the corrective for such a hypothesis would consist of making the offensive in the Ciamuria coincide with the one in Egypt: "*That can be done* -he asserted -*because for the 26th Graziani can also be ready*". It is not very clear on which basis he founded this opinion, sighted the last situation letter arriving from Tripoli, but Mussolini continued calmly:

"I would be anticipating by some days Graziani's attack. And then the fact of the conquest of Marsa Matruh will render the possibility still more difficult than a similar aid, especially foreseeing that we will not ourselves stop. Lose the hinge of Egypt, even if London could

still sustain itself, the British Empire would be in a State of collapse (...). Add a view of moral character and that this African success would boost to soldiers in Albania. That's why I desire in two actions a synchronism with a slight advance for African" ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

Not only, therefore, it was a "small amount" that would have moved the initial 10-15 October to 20 October about, but not stopping at Marsa Matruh ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾. On that day, Graziani was concluding a working memorandum with which aimed to clarify every doubt with the comfort of conclusive data. He sent the address of the 16th to Badoglio and he sent copies to Ciano. It started with the take way of one of Mussolini's firm beliefs:

"(...) If it can be regarded as certain that the British await us on the Delta for the final battle, cannot be excluded before hand that they intend to engaging with appropriate forces, backed the entrenched camp, occupation of Marsa Matruh, of obvious importance for the two sides.

The same reasons that cause us to want to perform, will push the enemy to want to prevent us.

Anyway who moves to attack cannot obviously basing his concept of operations on the assumed escape the enemy. It must consider the opposite, and occur at higher enemy forces, after a logistics organization that allows him to give life to the working body and feed it, and that, especially in the desert rises to importance (and in our case so very special) since the use of masses, for which the logistics factor-desert is colonial combines the tactical continental-European character ".

Then the calculation of the forces. The weekly situation no. 151 dated 3 October S.I.M. gave present 13-14 Anglo-Egyptian divisions, three of which are in the Western desert between Alexandria and Marsa Matruh, seven in the Delta region, two in the Canal zone and various units of a Division in middle and upper Egypt. The actual estimated about 200,000 were men, including 40,000 Egyptians, over which 20,000 men were coming from Britain and the Far East ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾. According to the S.I.M, the enemy would have had the intention of counter maneuver in the area of Alexandria-Delta. The entrenched camp of Marsa Matruh, organized to resist to the bitter end, even if passed, it was to establish

constitute a continuous threat on the side and on the rear of advancing Italian columns, but, if desperate, his garrison could be vacated by sea. To be honest this reconstruction does not appear very persuasive. With the availability of more than a dozen divisions it was not likely that the English will accept to leave the initiative and see our advanced air bases go eastward when easily were able to sweep in front of Marsa Matruh everything had passed the border. The forces being addressed immediately were instead decreased: previously always been given the 7th Arm. Div., the English 6th Inf. Div, the Indian Inf. Div and New Zealander Inf. Div and one or two divisions at Marsa Matruh; now the English 6th Inf. Div did not appear and the garrison of Marsa Matruh evidently was not rated at a divisional level. Graziani regarded for his 7th Armored problem (with between 400 tanks and armored cars), the Indian and the New Zealander. They planned to oppose: two Libyan divisions with infantry on foot, the *Sirte* Inf. Div and the motorized *Maletti* group, a corps artillery Group (two battalions of 149/13, two of 105/28 and three of 100/17), an armored grouping (70 M 11 tanks and 6 M 13 tanks) and one reserve trucked Metro Division. It is not easy to penetrate the thought of Graziani. He had, correctly, assumed that the entrenched camp of Marsa Matruh had a consistency not indifferent, that the enemy would accept battle by holding and that the attacker, i.e. himself, come to the appointment with obvious numerical superiority. He had then estimated-no matter, in terms of the reasoning, if rightly or wrongly-to fight against three British divisions, including an armored. Well, the correlation of forces that was intended to create or that accepted for the action was as follows: four binary divisions of infantry and the Maletti group against two ternary divisions that, in terms of "brigades", about nine Italian brigades against Indian and New Zealand are not counting the garrison of Marsa Matruh; two tank groupings of more or less to an armored brigade against the three brigades of the English 7th Arm. Div. Even apart from the logistical problem and seven British divisions deemed to be present in the Delta region, we must say that we understand what hope could be fed, the inability to achieve an operational superiority even in terms of armament.

Anyway for the complex of forces mentioned, the Comando Superiore had calculated logistical need support based on

a minimum of 3,200 trucks against an existence only 1,900 serviceable. The difference of 1,400 -that it went up to 1,930 when the Libyan infantries had been all so motorized -had to be covered with shipments from Italy ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

"This examination of the operating elements -concluded Graziani - leads me to judge about the impossibility to carry out the operation now and need to return to it when the conditions are met that will nullify the negative perspective and meaning..

- a) the road work already underway until Barrani;
- b) the aqua duct from Sollum to Barrani also started and that it could be completed with the means that I have already requirement in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, without need of supplies from the Motherland (...);
- c) organization in way of effectuation of the caterpillar trains of which I have requisitioned 60 (sixty) units between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, also them in way of influx, collection and systemizing of hauling, that would give a contribution of great importance solution to the of the logistic problem;
- d) to complete shipments in motor vehicles in the quantitative indicated in the "Memorandum".

This organization, intensifying to the maximum the efforts could be realized in the term of a pair of months and the most special theater of operations would put to us in conditions for acting with duty that guarantees and of which an operating concept is not possible not to hold account in considering formulating that a failure would have enormous repercussions for the entire course of war" ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾.

Also Gen. Porro tried to tighten the times and previewed for transfer to the area of Amseat (Fort Capuzzo) the 151st Fighter gruppo (Wing) before 20 October and the 50th Ground Attack stormo (Group) before the 25th. Moreover before the end of the month the airfields in the area of Sidi el-Barrani had to be prepared and if the materials at the moment to Tripoli are to flow quickly and if the trucks ready at Naples were to arrive in a few days, he thought to arm said advanced fields also before the first of November. Giving news of the rearrangement of the 5th Air Fleet, Graziani thought to have shined light on the entire picture of the theater as well. It is difficult to argue that it was a good psychologist. Frankly, regardless of vehicle detail calculations, it does not appear that as outlined in the Memorandum

as already been said the 30 September at Palazzo Venezia, without reservation. He would have enjoyed the immediate support of Badoglio, than indeed it had been unbalanced at first, and the persuasion would not have taken root in the Duce that it was matter of the usual irresolution. Instead aroused strong displeasure in Mussolini and in Badoglio resentment. The first, which was launched toward the Greek adventure, although "*angrily*" ordered him to respond "*to do what you believe*" ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ and the response reflects the mood:

"The Duce has examined your memorandum on the current situation of the eastern frontier and instructed me to inform you that he leaves to you all the time you think will necessary for convenient preparation.

With regard to of the demands made, it is for us to physically send the 1,300 and more trucks.

I have concerned Ecc. Roatta because of increased replacement parts and laborers in order to place in service the greater part of the 800 trucks declared not serviceable.

His Ecc. Roatta will soon inform you minutely what will be able to be sent" ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

Needless to say that the material impossibility of sending to Libya the motor vehicles sounds bad and that the issue of the replacements in order for the damaged vehicles sounds worse. Inasmuch as by now the inefficiency was going around via normal on 25-30%, it was evident that he had repaired nearly all the 800 units cited, just as many would have become unserviceable, without counting that after four months of war the organization for the repairs would have had to give better results. But it is probable that Badoglio was taken by the opening of the new theater of operations. However, just to point out, sent a second very annoyed letter;

"Yesterday, the 17th current, I received your memorandum on the situation to the eastern frontier. I have not been able to give it to the Duce today since he was visiting Terni.

I had a meeting this morning and the Duce made me observe that a copy of said memorandum was already on his table.

The Duce has deplored this system of addressing it directly to him.

I remind that you, he as the Chief of the G.S. of the R. Esercito, and I as the Supreme Commander in Libya, commands directly and that every document that referring to military operations sent by you must be for me exclusively. It is up to me to introduce them to the

Duce after having examined and having express my opinion" ⁽¹⁶²⁾.

Graziani was hit by the accusation, but rebounded when he exactly received the periodical memo from Roatta on the activity of the General Staff of the Army. In it, under the date of 18 October, it was written: "*The Chief General of the G.S. said to Ecc. Roatta: "Duce has surrendered to the reasoning of Ecc. Graziani". Probably he will not give more than the order to proceed on Marsa Matruh where we would find conditions less pleasing than at Barrani "*. Pushed, perhaps, from this rather more explicit acknowledgment of the real difficulties complained and taking to cue the most recent visit to Libya of Gen. von Thoma, 24 October Graziani again addressed Badoglio assuring that he would try to use the motor vehicles existing in Cyrenaica and those who's arrival had been foreseen "*yes to reach very soon possible degree of such preparations that allows me to resume offensive operations in Egypt*" ⁽¹⁶³⁾. In the meantime the greater a lapse of time concession from the Comando Supremo would have facilitated the solution of the three fundamental premises of bringing to completion of the operation: road work, aqueduct from the Fort Capuzzo to Sidi el-Barrani and caterpillars. First they proceeded with more and more intense rhythm, for much daily disturbed from the enemy air force; the collection of the local caterpillars was underway and with the inflow of those coming from Italy ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ existed some hope of being able to motorize an entire division. Moreover the creation of forward warehouses, already begun, had lighten considerably the logistic weight of major unit operations and allowed a clear elasticity also in maneuver of means of the intendenza. Exposure of the Supreme commander was based on the assumption that the British forces would have, yes, made resistance at Marsa Matruh, but only in the great Delta battle would all have been engaged. Limiting therefore the problem to the first objective, it became unavoidable to admit that the 10th Army lacked the diamond tip. Gen. von Thoma had spoken precisely about the German armored division predicate for that theater of operations ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾. The decisive weight of such unit was obvious and Graziani their convene, but he did not want to support an argument that he already knew was refused by Mussolini:

" There is no doubt -he wrote -than the employment in Cyrenaica of the armored division in the talks, therefore rich in means, will constitute very strong element for breakthrough, especially if employed for Marsa Matruh. Since my task is especially necessary for the march on

Matruh, for which we lack a unit exactly of this sort.

It is easy therefore to foresee now that the main merit of the success of the operation would be of this armored division.

I then asked if, politically, were it not convenient to avoid such contest or at least limitable to the last phase of the campaign".

Militarily speech was unfortunate and Graziani tried same, later, than to give a different meaning to his own words, , saying that "I was so very difficult to get back on topic, but however after, albeit in the form of reserve and doubtful (...) I presented at the occasion of the G.S. General eventually returning on topic with the Duce (...)" ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾.

Actually presented his solution: to constitute a similar major unit to with the tanks available ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾, completed by a motorized regiment of three battalions coming from the Army of the Po, possibly reinforced with some *Solothurn* antitank rifle armed units, and from "*some hundred*" armored car to be obtained from Germany. Surely this could be one way of escape, but rises a question: if Mussolini had maintained the refusal of German aid and if Berlin had not supplied the armored car -things, both, more than probable -as Graziani thought to carry to a successful operation on Marsa Matruh? The letter of the Supreme commander, finally, opened one crack on the final phase of the campaign:

"Still not yet in merit to the quantitative of means indispensable for the further push, for Matruh on the front, when it is a matter of taking the Delta, where a mass of approximately 15 divisions, with prepared positions will await us, with bridges to throw and the necessity made to cross the water. Because the water duct that is laboriously constructing from Capuzzo to Barrani will not be able to stop here, neither at Marsa Matruh, but will have follow for the entire the march ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾.

In this respect, the supreme commander of the engineers is making the relative calculations, that they become hyperbolic as employment of means of every kind and type (...).

The further prosecution of offensive operations is a complex issue in all its terms, of obvious exceptional importance and whose solution could be obtained only if we will decide adequate means in order to smash the enemy resistance and in order to tame the hundreds of kilometers of desert that separate to us from the objective".

Also to such care exit more than one perplexity. It was just

the case of just such a hint so vague to "after"? In order to defeat the 15 English divisions thought present and to reach the Suez Cannel evidently the existing troops in Cyrenaica were not enough, neither qualitatively nor quantitatively. When one agreed to place the problem in concrete terms? It was necessary to formulate, before still resolving them, the logistic aspects of the transports, the accumulation of supplies, the ordinary supplying, the repairs, the sanitary evacuations. In truth the supreme commander of the engineers (Gen. Molinari) already had put himself to work to the best of his ability. The provisions regarded distinguished aspects of the two requirements: the completion of the existing units and the inflow of new units to reinforce. On first the situation it was edifying, now that after a year non-belligerence and five months of war lacked *in total* or nearly the engineers of the XXI and XXII Corps and the divisions *Cirene* [63rd], 28 *Ottobre*, 1st and 2nd *Libyan*; many major units -army corps and divisions -did not have even the organic engineer units; only a few of the existing units possessed efficient motor pools and nobody was motorized. As far as the second to point, the demands were conspicuous: units and materials of the several specialties for the Comando Superiore in order agree the allocation of time now to this or that major unit (especially transmissions and handicraftsmen) and to supply to the technical operations not of divisional pertinence (especially railway men, pontooners and water); road haulage for all the equipments; special depots for particular requirements ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. Given the General situation in Libya and Italy, the bureaucratic inertia and the new military initiative in Greece, some was from not facing the illusion on the real possibility to receive thought how much indispensable (and this was only one of the aspects of the operating problem). Not even in six months, admitted and not granted that the enemy continued to reinforce with his divisions in the Delta. Consequently, Graziani would probably have made better to declare *apertis verbis** to Rome that, at the point in which they were the things and with means at his disposal, the Egyptian problem was for him irresolvable any hypothesis was to assume the basis of the strategic design: offensive until the Nile or conquest of Marsa Matruh and latter defensive battles in that country against the English, when they decided to change attitude.

In Rome, as it has been said, a good wind did not blow for Graziani. The idea of his replacement was in the air -but still had the charge of all nominal, chief of General staff of the Army! -and on 26 October, he received the new letter from Cirene, Gen. Armellini

* *apertis verbis* (Latin = expressly; explicitly)

pointed out to Badoglio the possibility, ventilated by Soddu, that Mussolini had ordered him to resolve the Libyan issue. The marshal answered "*with an air of resignation: " if he sends me I will go"*" ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾. There are no words to express the astonishment or a similar acquiescence, not as well as for the person who would eventually have taken the reins in North Africa, for how much the lack of importance that they concerned seemed to attribute to the burden carried at the apexes of the military apparatus. Badoglio, in addition to North Africa and Greece, thought to the meeting that he soon would have with Keitel. Knowing well that the main argument of the talks would be Egypt -he did not imagine how very painful that the Greek adventure would be- in putting in his version to Mussolini in f. 01/1740 of 24 October of Graziani fixed in a memorandum the line that he proposed to follow in the field.

The confrontation between opposing forces was naturally the first aspect of the situation touched on by Badoglio. The R. Esercito in Libya had approximately 230,000 men of which 80,000 were deployed on the Tunisian frontier in order to be ready for any event, with the now existing instability in the French empire, especially after the assumption of command on part of Gen. Weygand ⁽¹⁷¹⁾. They remained therefore 150,000 men for the operations against Egypt, but from which it was necessary to remove approximately 30,000 men for the services of the Intendenza, the various garrisons and for the defense of the lines of communication. After all, he could count on 120,000 men, including the divisional and corps services.

On the other side, according to the news summarized by the S.I.M. recently ⁽¹⁷²⁾, the English seemed to have had assembled 250,000 men, but, being that their Red Sea line of communications was not so susceptible to interruption, he could calculate that by the end of the year the Commonwealth troops would have reached 300,000 men and not considering those of the Egyptians. That entailed that in the Delta would be collected a mass of double the numbers regarding that at the disposition of Graziani. In those circumstances, the offered armored division from the Germans would have had insufficient weight. In essence, in order to change the force ratio to our favor it was necessary to send from Italy at least another 200,000 men. There was then the issue of the entrenchments at Marsa Matruh, whose photographic surveys indicated a defensive arrangement anything but rapid. That involved, from the Italian side, the necessity of heavy artillery that did not exist, an exception was made for some groups of 149 mm. Accurate studies of the photographs would have determined

certain numbers and caliber of the gun necessary ⁽¹⁷³⁾. At the present moment, being that is to say the 10th army at Sidi el-Barrani, the situation it appeared more favorable to the Italians than to English, but already at Marsa Matruh would be changes and, above all, every further step towards the east would be weighed much to our disfavor in regards to the supply lines. However, in order to move with a mass of at least 300,000 men with artilleries, tanks and *implement* a large logistics base at Marsa Matruh before having to create one and, latter, another a hundred kilometers more to the east. Now, in order to transfer to Libya the troops and the materials for reinforcements it was ships necessary for the transport and there were none, light ships for the escort and there was none, harbor equipment for unloading and there was none. And even if all that had been available, the feeding of a huge force thereafter overseas was a supreme enterprise to the Italian abilities. In conclusion, Badoglio wrote:

- "1st -the problem to attack the English forces in the delta of the Nile, given all the previous considerations, not fixable by us.
- 2nd -The aid that the Germans can give to us cannot resolve in any way the issue since the more serious deficiencies regards shipping, ports, certainly of escort.
- 3rd - The task that we can ourselves propose and resolve is that one to occupy Marsa Matruh, in order to allow our aviation, adequately escorted by fighters, to render the stay of the English fleet at Alexandria difficult.
- 4th -Arriving at Marsa Matruh, first care will have to be that to arrange the base defensively and the rear line of communications so as to be sure against offensive return of the enemy.
- 5th - The aid that can be given by the Germans is for to seek essentially in aviation in dive bombers with relative fighters. If the Germans insist in giving also the armored division, it will first be necessary to explain their limits to them and the goals of our action, in the terms that I have shown above ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

The basic problem, it is worth saying the explicit declaration that the Comando Supremo was not in a position to resolving the game with own means, we can also agree because of too many losses will empty our military instrument. On the issues collaterals he is himself less disposed to accept clear categorical affirmations. First of all, the defeat of the British army was sought by means of a mass of 300-350,000 infantry men and one advance.

methodical in the desert atmosphere, conception on whose validity was to permissible nourish some doubt. The force of impact, the rapidity of progression and the decisive ability of the major armored unit did not seem appreciated to the right degree. That the war in North Africa was different than a European war in the mountains and from a colonial was not yet clear. It is certain that we were not in the condition of power allowing to lead a campaign like that one Kitchener lead against the Mahdisti. Obvious it was the importance of the bases and the lines of communications, but the circumstance could not be neglected that a base bordering on the sea and easy isolable from a highly maneuverable enemy of means and mentality at least had the need of a direct or indirect support from the sea. Nevertheless the participation of the Navy either was not covered; nearly it fought for its own account. Not only that, but – always considering an armored adversary - the realization of a sure line of operations, that one became uncertain that had to feed the battle and to which Napoleon had always dedicated every attention. For reasons of this kind also stopping at Marsa Matruh gave insufficient confidence. In short: we having not created a tool that all indicated necessary and decisive, was necessary to accept by the Germans, despite knowing that they would very soon have played the parts of the savior and the winner. Badoglio concluded: *"These are the considerations that I have thought necessary to express to you, Duce, and await for your decisions"*. To this end you can openly disagree in substance and in form. It was taken for granted that Graziani could occupy Marsa Matruh overcoming enemy resistance (although the movement of short expiration with two or three divisions of the many considered in the Delta it did not constitute a clear problem for Wavell), which the German armored division was not indispensable, that English would remained on the defensive and anchored in their current location for a pair of months. Much too comfortable. The attitude of the enemy Badoglio spoke against a British *"counter offensives"*. But on 25 October, as can be seen two days before, the S.I.M. had communicated:

"They had manifested in recent times, symptoms and positive clues the indications that they are given to think their imperial General Staff intention to assume offensive initiative" ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾,

and indicated our forces at Sidi el-Barrani as likely target. This eventuality could not be relegated to a simple counter maneuver

of Wavell after to our occupation of Marsa Matruh, nor diminished as a "counter offensive". And if it had been clear and their offensive in great style occurred for the 260,000 men (and soon 300,000) of Egypt? And if the English had chosen in inverse sense, that they could, direct an attack to which Graziani had abdicated for lack of mechanized units: Der el Harnra-Bir el Chreigat-Gabr Bu Fares, heading for Bardia? Berti could have avoided the encirclement retreating or arresting the marching wing to south of the escarpment? With regard to the formal aspect, it is from emphasize that to Mussolini an alternative was not in the mail on which had to decide, nor a conduct line to accept *sic et simpliciter**, good or bad it was, instead, suggested a solution with the declared readiness to obey even Intellectualization choices, as indeed was going to Greece.

Mussolini shared the viewpoint of Badoglio, which he quickly informed, Graziani:

"I have given the Duce to view Your sheet 01/174010p. dated the 24th current month.

The orders of the Duce responding to you are:

1st -The objective to achieve is Marsa Matruh;

2nd -He does not see the possibility, but in case of upheaval of the situation in Egypt, to proceed beyond Marsa Matruh;

3rd -He has declined to the Führer the sending of the German division;

4th - Order of the occupation of Marsa Matruh is that of being able to strike with attack aircrafts accompanied by fighters, the port of Alexandria;

5th -He will relate to the General Staff of the R. Esercito for the shipment of what is demanded, except for the armored car, that we do not have and that the Germans cannot give to us" ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

Therefore, neither German aid nor "*some hundred*" armored car. The 10th Army had to act without a diamond tip. Graziani did not have the time to reflect on the issue since a courier delivered a personal letter to him from Mussolini:

"Dear Graziani,

at a distance of 40 days from the taken of Sidi el-Barrani, I ask the question:

this long pause who benefited? us or the enemy?

Hesitate not a minute to answer: it only has helped more, indeed exclusively, the enemy

Latin* = **so simply

In fact:

- a) on the tactical field it has allowed him to reconstitute his Armored division, that of the rest he did not have losses of importance. They tell me that the English prisoners we have taken rise to the total of 6 and that the number of medium armor captured is still lower;
- b) in the strategic field the enemy above all has accumulated such forces and such means to east of Marsa Matruh and in the Delta, to render infinitely more onerous our attack. If it will be still delayed in order to complete until to the last kilometer our roads and our aqueducts, the attack will be still more difficult and practically impossible.
- c) during this period, while we do not have targets for our aviation - if not empty fields of fortune -English aviation is literally tearing up the rear from Sollum to Benghazi. At a certain point we will not have any bases in the rear and will have the rear demoralized also from the point of view of the men.

On the subject of the rear allow me to tell you that your headquarters is much far from the front and this allows the absorption of the front on part of the rear area Commanders, when would have to be the opposite force on the rear lines.

Now this pause, that held already for 40 days, would have to still continuing for another 60 days and reaching to 15 December is not clear -at least from what you said to me in your report - that you feel able to move.

In these conditions - which, I must tell you, provoked a strong disappointment in Italy and Germany and that impact, as far as I know, also on the moral of your troops it is now of ask you felt to continue to hold the command or if, consider you unjustly confined or set aside, preferred quitting.

I repeat to you that at the peace table we will bring home what we will have conquered militarily. It was not worth the pain of having 16 months of time for preparations, to obtain all what you have asked, to have 15 divisions, in order to bring home Sidi el-Barrani?

I pray for you to answer me with concern.

Mussolini" ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾.

For Graziani it was "*a lighting blow*", as expressed in his memoir. To the tight courier circle, he replied with bitterness for the critics to his own action of command and life had hardly been stranger for the contrast between the communications of Badoglio on 18 October (just

eight days before!): *"Duce... has personally charged me to inform you that he leaves you all the time you think will be necessary for a convenient preparation"* ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ and the explicit dilemma that he now had to move to very soon or that they asking for his removal from the assignment. Rejecting all the accusations, recapitulation the main aspects of the operating problem, emphasized that the logistical situation was practically unchanged and reiterated that "today, in my judgment, there is no other way then to continue exactly on this course [of a long preparation) holding account of the important enemy preparations". Then he came to the point: if any possibility had been seen to hurry the offensive on Marsa Matruh they would have without another fact, but was swayed not to be able to allow before the end of December; consequently, if this assessment was considered incorrect " my duty is the only one, that is to ask to be recalled and be replaced" ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾, Mussolini received the long letter at Grottaglie, in the Puglie, where he meant to establish his own tactical Command in order to follow the operations in Greece. He was of good humor since Gen. Ranza, the commander of the air force of Albania, arrived from Tirana with favorable news on the beginning of the offensive, by writing to Visconti Gen. Prasca: "they are content with the operations in this first phase" ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾. He did not therefore have difficulty to back on his promise issued in the either/or:

"Dear Graziani - he wrote - I received your letter and I'm answering you by considering the issue closed and reconfirming my full confidence in you.
The main front is -now -the Greece; You will sure alleviate the task of the operating troops in Greece:
a) by attacking the English forces before you every time that they will come into your reach;
b) by completing the preparations for the operation on Marsa Matruh, that objective remains of exceptional importance for the reasons that are useless to repeat.
Therefore work for your new African Victory" ⁽¹⁸¹⁾,

Graziani received the original on 5 November. In the meantime Badoglio had gathered the chiefs of General staff in order to examine the issues of reinforces sent to Albania and of the eventual invasion on Corfu. During the argument he expressed without ceremony; "That the advance on Marsa Matruh is to be made in December or January, at present it means little. In order now that more urgent and important problem is Greece" and invited Soddu to look to Mussolini

convenience to divert to Valona and Durazzo the promise shipment of a large number of motor vehicles to Cyrenaica ⁽¹⁸²⁾. After a few days the unexpected events in Greece imposed a still clearer sudden turn in the priority by attributing them to the Balkan theater of operations. In Rome there was much restlessness: on 4 November Mussolini convened the chiefs of General staff in order to communicate his intention to increase the troops of Albania to the level of an army group and to entrust the command to Soddu; on 7 November the Viscount Gen. Prasca telegraphed to the ministry of war that the offensive in Ciamuria could be considered arrested by the Greek resistance. That day Badoglio communicated to Graziani the new strategic line of conduct for the war: in Albania all out land and air offensive in order to achieve "*the integral occupation of Greece*"; in Libya limited aerial and land operations "*the conquest of Marsa Matruh*" from where then, arranged to firm the defense assets, to carry out lively aerial action on the port of Alexandria to make life impossible to the English fleet; in the Aegean the defensive understanding to conserve the colony and aerial and naval offensive action against the English and Greek fleets; defensive in East Africa in order to last as long as possible; Navy had to assure the protection of the traffic with Albania and Libya, keeping ready to oppose to eventual British offenses. After the Greek enterprise would have absorbed a strong contingent of troops (from 20 to 25 divisions) and of materials, Comando Superiore N.A. had to adapt the demands to the "*new limited requirements*" ⁽¹⁸³⁾. In fact part of much that was requested by Graziani was closely reported to Marsa Matruh, translated in poor conditions meant the directives that Alexandria as a ground objective was not to say absolutely the case, at least for many months, and that it was necessary to get to Marsa Matruh what had arrived in Cyrenaica, to partial shipments already established by the General Staff of the Army. Not a word on how much was said he could do to Wavell.

During the month of November there were two elements on which polarized the attention of Graziani: the motor vehicle situation (problem that will always harass the commanders of Africa) and the operating activity aimed to engage the British troops in the Egyptian western desert. The memorandum of 15 October had represented the minimal requirements of 1,300 trucks in order to resume the offensive. Although at first the negative answer of the Comando Supremo, Roatta, intended to find a solution, calculated at least that the demand could be granted, in great part, and short time. They were

found in shipment course in fact, besides 850 trucks and 300 trailers and 500 others trucks would have been prepared presumably before February; also the starter of the 22 trailers for the M 13 tanks of the III battalion had already had place. Moreover, of agreement with Soddu, it arranged the shipment to Libya of Col. Amione, General manager of motorization, to the goal to accelerate the remittance to efficiency of the mass of motor vehicles marked as damaged with the situated examination in of the effective necessities and the search of the more suitable means for an immediate expansion of the current organization of repairs ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾. A commission appointed by Graziani, and to which Col. Amione also participated, made, therefore, the point. It was meticulous work that, studied then by the General Staff of the Army allow to reach the following conclusions. The situation of the trucks - the special motors vehicle and means excluded therefore -had believed satisfactory as to the effective efficient means availability in Cyrenaica on 10 November amounted to 3,887 units, which 1,367 means in travel or in route to Naples for a total of 5,254 trucks, with a surplus of 1,410 units on the 3,844 cited in the report ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ and then covering largely the need for 1,300 designated by Graziani. . Later they will replicate the figures demonstrating that the difference came down to around 200 trucks approximately, reason for which to the operating column they were necessary more than 1,100 means. You cannot, of course, to formulate comments on the individual compute facts in Rome and Cirene, however it seems legitimate to remember that Graziani had introduced a very narrow account excluding even the road haulage of the Libyan infantry, that of the *caterpillars* lacking in place of which would have employed trucks, that the small vans could calmly be excluded from the calculation given their reduced capacity and those organic to the divisions were insignificant that limited. In other words, yes, on the paper the accounts could square, but only for an army in which the concept of the motorization -we do not speak about that of the *guerra di rapido corso**-still had to do even a long way ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾. Inevitably the thought runs to the 2,500 motor vehicles of the offered German armored division. Unfortunately among the short it would have been seen at which the destiny of the dismounted Italian infantries latter encounter.

With regard to repairs, not only could not keep up with daily inefficiencies, but less was thought to eliminate the large number of damaged vehicles - approximately 2,000 -if not adopting special measures. First of all

*Italian equivalent to Blitzkrieg, in fact predates it as a theory.

everything, was made the decision to return to Italy the trucks in need of major overhaul and those for which, given the sparsely of models in Libya, it was not abandoning stocks of spare parts, so that the General directorate office of the motorization supplied to their repair or substitution; then it was necessary to increase the efficiency of the park workshops sending from the motherland four heavy trucks machine-shop and equipment for a reinforced workshop type A, as well as one hundred skilled workers; finally to improve the maintenance of the motor vehicles by means of the shipment of four heavy service and sixteen medium service stations. It is the case to place in prominence that for simplicity the commission had abstained from making a survey on the state of usury and the ancientness in type of the motor vehicles of Libya⁽¹⁸⁷⁾

Naturally Graziani had followed these studies and called into question on 14 November with a somewhat bitter letter to the chief of the General Staff. After having premised to comprise the serious moment very well, he specified:

"The troops march on foot with the minimum of motor transport, without baggage train, trucks for the supply from the depots to the periphery of the deployment. Everything will be kept to a minimum, but in order to give life to the battle it is necessary to have the certainty to realize at the head of the line with an imposing mass fire for the first chess move on the *Jebel* that dominates Marsa Matruh and its entrenchments; with one armored brigade and at least one motorized division to throw similarly along at once.

In order to obtain this the means available now are not sufficient (...) ⁽¹⁸⁸⁾,

and I request that before the end of the month that can be extended flow all which had been promised. Therefore, putting into meaningful evidence that the requisitions operated in Libya almost had paralyzed every other form of local activity and that the populations followed in quite the orders while for the slowness of the supply of provisions from Italy "hunger strikes more than in a place at the doors", he concluded:

"With this letter I said my last word. My effort cannot go beyond the limits of the possible, of the human and the most determined. I wouldn't be the tragic moment had made huge efforts and water, road and still have to wait for the

remainder.

Then of course the responsibility of the events will not be able to only fall back on me cannot be just about me from the front to the Homeland who alone is immortal"
(189).

Badoglio, information on shipments, held to emphasize that all the material, pipes for aqueduct construction, already had been sent or were in course of shipment, although delays, also remarkable, which had to lacked the timely authorization to the shipment on part of the Comando Superiore N.A., and that

"I can't help but point out that the only field in which needed further efforts is essentially that of maritime transport for part of your employee: unloading in the ports of Libya and acceleration in the restitution to the Homeland of empty steamships" (190).

That all the faults were Graziani's could not be and in fact his retort dated 3 Decembers brought to light giving the authorization of the Comando Superiore to the arrival to Tripoli of the ships from Naples they waited from the 10th to the 15th; the specialized laborers, operative workshops and machines still had not arrived; Ditto for the aqueduct material. As far as the motor vehicles, it had turned out that part of the disembarked vehicles were requisitioned (therefore little adapted to the African environment) and several of them were... unserviceable. Moreover the loading completed at Naples did not shine for care, intermingling the kinds destined to Tripoli with those for Cyrenaica (191).

This letter, that he contested point by point all the observations, was accompanied by a dispatch more conciliating and reassuring message to the point of the operation: "*The troops are by now all clenched between Bardia and Barrani. The depots on course to completion. To enliven all the organization does not but lack these motor vehicles in route*" (192). He did not have an answer however: on 26 November Badoglio had resigned to his dismissal (193).

During the phase of preparation, Graziani did not want naturally to limit himself to a situation of tactical do-nothing policy. The movement of the bulk of the 10th Army to between Bardia and Sidi el-Barrani had modified to the worse the vulnerability of the rear. All along southern flank of the formation he was uncovered and the reoccupation of the main places of the frontier (194) had not brought any sensitive improvement in the degree of safety against the incursions of units of the British 7th Arm. Div., that certainly were not blocking episodes

heading for wide radius in the desert. As a result, while it provided to a consolidation of the occupied positions and the strengthening of the ground, from 18 September there already were actions of motorized columns in order to hold far away the enemy and allow in a relatively calm atmosphere the realization of a minimum of defensive organization. The larger Army reconnaissance was that one carried out on 7-8 October on Gabr Abu Raydan by a column of the [63rd] *Cirene* Inf. Div., they got in the area of Alam er-Rabia to the extreme east of the escapement which headed towards Sollum, and by one of the 2nd Libyan division, deployed to the south of Sidi el-Barrani (sketch n. 9). The two columns meet the 7th at Bir Enha, in the wide interval existing between the two units, will proceed the following day with the objective, of forcing enemy medium armor to withdraw. The employment of flying columns acquired greater importance after 28 October, with the continuation of the directive from Badoglio to engage the forward English forces seriously, especially the armor, in concurrence with the beginning of the campaign of Greece. On 15 November the Libyan divisions group, deployed as a whole to the East and South of Sidi Barrani, operated with two columns -one per division -reinforced by medium tanks and accompanied by fighters in the area of Alam el-Qatrani: the crashes were of short duration and the enemy quickly became freed himself protecting himself with his artillery. To this our activity, based also on wide employment of aviation, the British Command contested with a series of naval, aerial and land actions: bombardments from the sea on our coastal preparations; nocturnal aerial bombings, especially, on the logistics centers of Sidi el-Barrani, Bug Bug, Sollum, Bardia, Bengasi; aerial reconnaissance on our forward positions; aimed at the forward observers for the positions of the 10th Army and of disturbance at the rears.

It was said of the wide interval existing between the group Libyan divisions, of which the Maletti grouping was part, and the [63rd] *Cirene*. The troops of Maletti appeared the most exposed as for their insufficient consistency are hence lacking in a support wing. The wide passage of Bir Enba - that will be revealed fatal - said he at once commented to Graziani that they spoke with Berti. These the evening of the 18th were informed by Maletti of the English medium tanks infiltration towards the northeast, that is towards the heart of the 10th Army's rear, and, thinking the possibility of the next attack of disturbance, he decided that a battalion of M-11 tanks of 1st Regiment reach Maletti immediately; that a fast column of the 2nd Libyan and one of the Maletti grouping were prepared in order to take part at the opportune moment

Schizzo n. 9

Alam el Agad
2402

108
Alam el Kheifa

Rgt.
Maletti

Alam el Tummara

Tuet Sallag

Alam el Hamam

Alam el Niliwat

Div.
Cirene

Bir Enba

Alam el Neuf

Gabi Abu Raydan

Alam el Melia

5 Novembre

19 Novembre

7 Octobre

19 Novembre

19 Novembre

8 Octobre

opportune with the rest of the remaining medium tanks near Sidi el Barrani; that, finally, the next day, where the attack was not pronounced during the nocturnal hours, the land to south of our positions was struck, on basis on the result of the aerial reconnaissance. The morning of the 19th Gen. Gallina, commander of the Libyan divisions, informed that aviation had attacked enemy armored car at Bir Enba and in the area of Alam Abu Hileiuat some thirty kilometers to the south of Sidi el-Barrani, and that mechanized units were waiting to the north-west of Alam el-Heilif, he ordered that the two fast columns, move respective from the forward positions of Alam el- Tummar and Alam Nibeua, head at Alam Abu Hileiuat, with the task to explore the area in a radius of three kilometers. The 2nd Libyan held in reserve to another column. At 12:40 the column of Maletti ⁽¹⁹⁵⁾, arrived in order before Alam Abu Hileiuat and made signs of shooting artillery and was attacked by armored car and tank, was engaged in a bitter duel. Towards 13:00 the column of 2nd Libyan arrived ⁽¹⁹⁶⁾, they quickly, took part with the fire, reacting to the enemy attempt to turn his flanks. After a hard fight, the English units ⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ were repulsed; however, during the return to the bases of the Italian units, they returned to provoke lively combat with rearguard, resolved to our favor also, for the participation of a squadron of Ba-65 that carried out strafing at a low altitude. At the same time, a group of CR-42 dealt an enemy air force, succeeding to shooting down six *Gloster* without enduring losses. It was moreover hastened also the column of the reserve, sent from the 2nd Libyan ⁽¹⁹⁸⁾.

The crash of 19 November was meaningful. First of all the M.11 tanks demonstrated once again their limits, especially those caused by the lack of the turret. Secondly you openly poses the problem of the real utility of flying columns. Gen. Gallina expressed with much candor. If these columns had the aim to hold in check the adversary would have been sufficient with desultory reconnaissance in the radius of seven-eight kilometers and, therefore, in the area between one major unit and the other. If, instead, their aim were to search and to engage in combat with British mechanized formations in order to capture and to destroy those elements, they were not at all suitable, with the means of which at the moment they equipped, to achieve such aim. Indeed the enemy counterattacked to said columns -constituted, in best of the hypotheses, by a the mass of truck transported artillery and by an insufficient number of tanks - faster means, more powerful and better protected,

supported by mobile artilleries and with longer range. He had moreover a well organized network of observation and of connections and, favored by the uncovered and easy practicable land, could concentrate the forces thought necessary quickly in order to accept or to impose a combat with favorable outcome. Furthermore, the Italian columns, at a given time, or because arrived at the objective or because forced from enemy action, however to explain their only positive characteristic (firepower), was forced to stop: but when they had to make the return to their respective positions, they found themselves to face the crisis of separation and of withdrawal, just when the adversary had the bulk of his forces in power or even in action. And the withdraw imposed, with their alternate of the echelons, the halving of the forces in order to face the enemy, which doubled his aggressiveness.

"In these action of combat - Gallina in his report to the Command of the 10th Army asserted - the ability and the value of our commanders and our privates, but we can never put our focus a clear tangible success (...)"

In fact the results of these actions were certainly not striking and the enemy not if some of them showed constrained, but it was an attempt to oppose in any way the desert domain that the British had already acquired.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

- 1 A. Truchet. op. cited, p. 91
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 PAUL BAUDOUIN, *Neufmois au Gouvernement (April- December 1940)*, Table Ronde, Paris 1948, p. 207. In the revelation of Weygand or the report of Baudouin large distortions of the verbiage are found: four divisions of campaign besides two more regiments had not left Africa in May-June and not four but six remained, without to count the three of protection in Algeria and numerous of smaller forces. Moreover there were 268 modern tanks H.35, R.35 and D. 1 and even Somua of 20 tons. (that to the armistice will be irregularly sent to Dakar).
- 4 A.Truchet, cited Op., pp. 94-95.
- 5 YVES BOUTHILLIER, *Le drame de the Vichy. Face à l'ennemi face à l'allie*, Plon, Paris 1950, pp. 107-108. W. SHIRER, Op. cited, pp. 1055-1056. A TRUCHET, Cited Op., pp. 366- 368.
- 6 A.TRUCHET, cited Op., pp. 98-99.
- 7 Altogether, the flow of aerial units comprised 24 bombing groups with 431 aircraft of which 295 in full serviceability; 17 fighter groups with 710 aircraft of which 523 serviceable; 39 reconnaissance groups with 500 aircrafts of which serviceable. The other aircraft were from transport and for the schools. Two thirds of the aircrafts had been sheltered in Morocco. Other units landed at Dakar, Gibraltar, in Egypt and Syria.
Also the availability was air arriving within the second fortnight of June there arrived in North Africa approximately 10,000 pilots, among which numbered 600 officers, from France and Great Britain, also some hundreds of Belgian and more then a thousand Poles, with a good percentage of pilots.
- 8 To approximately 10 June Noguès began to take account of the ability of North Africa could cover in relationship to the war and, among several practical efforts in order to overcome prolific deficiencies at least partially, was also a sent telegram to Washington 20 June for the purchase and the urgent shipment of above all 10,000, rifle rounds, 200 antitank guns, 100 modern tanks and ammunitions, more than to 600 motor vehicles.
- 9 WINSTON CHURCHILL, *The Second World War*, Part II, Vol. I, Mondadori, Milan 1949, p.204.
- 10 A. CUNNINGHAM, cited Op., p. 59.
- 11 *Pursto di vista italiano sulle condizioni di armistizio* in FRANCISCO ROSSI, *Mussolini e lo Stato Maggiore*, Rome 1951, pp.174-175.
- 12 Memoranda on the convention of Monaco spread by Gen. Roatta in F. ROSSI, op. cited, p. 16, and relation of Mussolini in *Mussolini e Hitler*, cit., p. 28.
- 13 LEONARDO SIMONI, *Berlino ambasciata d'Italia*, Migliaresi, Rome 1946, p. 133. On the particular relative of the armistice vds. F. ROSSI, op. cited, p. 67 and seg., and EMILIO FALDELLA, *L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Capelli, Bologna 1959, p. 179 and seg.
- 14 FREDERICK DEAKIN, *Storia della repubblica di Salò*, Einaudi, Torino 1963, p. 64.
- 15 DSCSAS, telegram 01/205602 dated 20.6.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 16 Historical diary of the High command supreme command DSCS, tele f.1/854 dated 23.6.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 17 Tele 018 date 16.6.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S.
- 18 The column lost 200 men, 4 pieces, 30 motor vehicles and 12 light trucks.

- 19 The action of the D'Avanzo column was surely not commendable on the organizational plan. It, already prepared as the mobile element of the XXI Army Corps, movements from the area in which it was located on orders of the Commander of the Army. The Commander of XXI Corp arrived at the time to completed facts, with the preconception that the action was under the direct control of the Commander of Army. After a few hours Gen. Dalmazzo received a communication from the column -in which, they were blocked by a British mechanized forces, was found by now in a tragic situation -which was sent to units attached to XXI Corp, they therefore had to urgently provide to it support. Naturally timely participation was impossible, al so -it was in the hands to the Armed forces high command (the testimony of Gen. Rinaldini, already Major (maggiore) S.S.M to the operations section of XXI Corp).
- 20 The light tanks were looked at to perform always on par with the Boys antitank Rifle, of which the armored cars and the English motorized units were equipped. The thing, tank crewman soon disclosed in the ambient, had large psychological and material impediments in the employment. The situation improved with the use of the *Solothurn* Rifles, installed also on the L Tanks.
- 21 The Supreme Command, *Relazione campagna dell'A.S 1940-43*, 1st part (now cited as Ref. CS), tele 08/marcia date 14.6.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S.. With respect to such relation it is useful to specify that a synthesis draft of the military events of reference, compiled by the Supreme Command during the war, whose greatest asset tidily resides in having collected copies of all - or nearly -the communications of that office between Armed forces high command A.S and Supreme Command (letters, dispatches, telegrams). None particularly meaningful, therefore, regarding the correspondence guarded in the actions of the archives, but comfort of consultation of material not always easy available in the original or, sometimes, lost.
- 22 Truly, according to the S.I.M. the 7th Ann. Div. had 286 between tanks and armored cars. In the action of the 14th against Fort Capuzzo there was estimated 200 present between tanks and armored cars.
- 23 Ref. CS, cited tele 018 date 16.6.1940 of C.S.F.A.A.S., attached 10.
- 24 In a cycle of ten of days there was moved from the 5th to the 10th Army: the 2nd Libya Div., XXIII Corp less the infantry of the 2nd CC.NN. Div., two light tank battalions, 55th "Savona" artillery, eight 65/17 batteries, three 20 mm. batteries, a 47/32 company, two telegraph companies, 1100 motor vehicles (comprised those of the foretold units), 24 ambulances and all the insufficient armor-piercing supply for the 20, 47 and 65 mm.
- 25 In the afternoon of same day the 18th, the Supreme Command communicated that, for overall unavailability of cruisers, that naval action had to be effected with the naval destroyers of Tobruk, to that Balbo replied that he was abdicating such employment because of very disproportionate risks and that would have entrusted the task solely to the Air Force. In fact on the morning of the 19th one formation of a score of aircraft machine gunned and dispersed a armored column between Bug Bug and Sollum. In the subsequent aerial combat against British squadrons the noticed is made before their arrival of specter *Spitfire*.
- 26 Ref. CS, tele 1/551 date 19.6.1940 of the Supreme Command. To find that Libya from 9 January 1939 was metropolitan territory.
- 27 Ref. CS tele 1/581 date 19.6.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 28 Ref. CS, f. 01/205594 date 20.6.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S.
- 29 Ref. CS, f. 01/205602 date 21.6.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S.

- 30 Ref. CS, f01/685 date 21.6.1940 of the Supreme Command,
- 31 Ref. CS, f01/205917 date 28.6.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S.
- 32 Ref. CS, f 1/932 date 25.6.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 33 Report of meeting appendix II
- 34 DSCS, date 26.6.1940.
- 35 Ref. C.S, f. 1/955 date 26.6.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 36 The day of the solemn funeral of Balbo in Tripoli, an English fighter flew over the area and dropped a metallic box of with a parachute of tricolour tape. Containing a message from Mar. Longmore *"the Royal Air Force expresses the sincere regret for the death of Italian Marshal Salbo, a great knight and a valiant flyer. I had known him personally. The destiny has made us enemies"*. A gesture from soldier
- 37 At the end of the war Badoglio commented: *"I was not at all convinced that Marshal Graziani was up to his place as Chief of general staff of the Army. He lacked adequate preparation and he did not have any familiarity with the complex problems of a Chief of General Staff therefore great"* (PIETRO BADOGLIO, *L'Italia nella Seconda guerra mondiale*, Mondadori, Milan 1946, p 48) All true, but he dose not explain neither why, at the due time, he was not opposed to the nomination, nor why it was not then been useful for the departure of Graziani for Libya as Supreme commander for it has to be done replacing.
- 38 RODOLFO GRAZIANI, *Africa settentrionale* (1940-1941), Danesi, Rome 1948, p. 44 makes reference this work, rather then to the Memorial compiled by the marshal on continuation of the inquiry Thaon di Revel, for comfort of consultation from part of the readers.
- 39 Ref. CS, tele 1073/op. dated 3.7.1940 of the Supreme Command quoted.
- 40 R GRAZIANI, *op cited*, p 47. But there existed an old provisional work of assembly D (P.R.D), created in 1938 -before the distribution of P.R. 12 -with which Balbo foresaw an effort with seven divisions on Marsa Matruh and Alexandria and a simultaneous action with the motorized Libyan divisions from Giarabub on Marsa Matruh.
- 41 R. GRAZIANI, *cited Op.*, p. 42. The matter seems of very little reliable because a plan of the sort involves a series of studies of logistic nature, as they cannot avoid the participation of officials of the various branches. Very probably it was simply a matter of the old conception that Balbo careless went with.
- 42 Report of meeting, appendix 12.
- 43 Report of meeting given 2.7.1940 appendix 13.
- 44 Ref. CS, tele 1073/op. dated 3.7.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 45 Summary compiled by the Ministry of the war, cabinet, appendix 14.
- 46 DSCS, 1239/op. dated 11.7.1940 of Supreme Command -appendix 15.
- 47 DSCS, f. 1089/op. dated 4.7.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 48 From the memorandum of the office ordering and mobilization of the Army General Staffon the agreements made with Gen. D'Aponte, from these are drawn a few eloquent figures. By giving 28 field hospitals of the 35 demands it was necessary remove to 14 divisions; it was hardly possible to assign to 20 ambulances instead of the 200 necessary and one of only two existing hospital ships in Italy; the units of the motor service in Motherland with difficulty reached 40% of the war personnel and, coming in most part from requisition, they introduced the large problem of repairs and replacement parts.

- 49 The 4th Inf. tank Regt., with a command of and two medium tank battalions (approximately 600 men, 72 M II tanks, 56 motor vehicles, 37 motorbikes and 76 towing carts) moved from Benghazi to Tobruk (600 km) by ordinary highway. They were equipped with towed carts of various types, of inferior capacity to the tonnage of the tanks, for which reason very many towed carts, as soon as loaded, "were unloaded".
- 50 DSCSAS, tele 01/206436/op date 12.7.1940 of the Armed forces High Command
- 51 Ref. CS, tele 1274/op date 13.7.1940 of the Supreme Command
- 52 Ref. CS, tele 1299/op. date 14.7.1940 of the Supreme Command
- 53 On 7 July, in Berlin, Keitel had said to Ciano that for the moment *"there is not anything to decide on part of just the General Staff"* and the morning of the 14th he was give to Mussolini a letter, dated the 13th, with which Hitler communicated that his preparations for the attack on England covered much complexity and demanded "a sure tempo", he thanked for the offer of land and aerial forces presented by Ciano and he suggested for him to concentrate every effort on an offensive in Egypt up to the Suez Canal.
- 54 Ref. CS, tele 01/206500/op date 15.7.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S. appendix 16
- 55 Ref. CS, tele 1311/op date 15.7.1940 the Supreme Command. appendix 17
- 56 Ref. CS, tele C.84/2011 date 19.7.1940 of the C.S.F.A.A.S
- 57 Ref. CS, tele 1404/op date 20.7.1940 the Supreme Command
- 58 DSCSAS, f. 2023/op date 23.7.1940 the Armed forces High Command, appendix 18
- 59 The grouping had been constituted on 8 July in order to create of special major unit, with wide logistic and tactical autonomy, particularly adapted to operate isolated in the desert, regions of insufficient water and other resources. It originally had three commands groups, seven Libyan battalions, a Saharan battalion, two artillery battalions, a mixed tank battalion with one company M II tanks and one company light tanks, two 47/32 guns companies, one 81 mm mortar company, two 20 mm batteries, one Radio company, one company water and organic services. Nearly all of the Libyan units came from Tripolitania and the territories of the interior and was extremely heterogeneous. Except the four battalions of old constitution, the others had not completed recruit training and, with the overwhelming majority of them recalled from the reserves, *"they constituted a amorphous mass and without spirit, plus resigned cheerfully to their own fate"*. This *"bitter cold moral"*, as it defined by Gen. Maletti, perhaps mainly drew organically from obligatory military service introduced before the hostile atmosphere traditional to it, from the unexpected removal of the battalions from native ground, from exaggerated news on the power of the average enemy armor. The allocation of the tanks and antitank pieces, let alone the certain sprit exercised by Graziani, was worth however considerably to improve the fore told climate.
- 60 Ref CS, tele 1507/op date 26.7.1940 of the Supreme Command, *op cited*, pp. 215 -216
- 61 Ref. CS, f. 1510/op date 26.7.1940 of the Supreme Command
- 62 DSCSAS, f. 03/op date 29.7.1940 of the Armed forces High Command, appendix 19.
- 63 Note of Badoglio for Mussolini date 30.7.1940 -appendix 20
- 64 Signed Note of the Mar. Badoglio on date 30.7.1940.
- 65 DSCS, f. 159310p. date 31.7.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 66 DSCS, f. 2388 date S.R.P./Sup. 1.8.1940 of the Chief of S.M. of the R. Marina.
- 67 cited Cfr. appendix 14.
- 68 The Lancia Ro heavy truck carried a payload of 5 tons.

- 69 Study *Operazione Alessandria* -appendix 21.
- 70 to begin from the reliability of the demands, the single issue of the 5.200 heavy trucks seems to have been sufficient "to freeze" the plan, does not turn out, in fact, to have received in Rome serious attention
- 71 DSCSAS, memorandum introduced by Graziani 5.8.1940 -appendix 22.
- 72 DSCS, staff note of Badoglio dated 6.8.1940.
- 73 GALEAZZO CIANO *Diario* 1937-1943, Rizzoli, Milan 1980, p 456
- 74 Report of the meeting and letter of transmission from Graziani to Badoglio, appendix 23
- 75 DSCSAS, f04/op. dated 18.8.1940 from the Supreme Commander. A letter are dated *Cirene* 18 August, but in truth it was written in the first hours of the 19th, nearly at the same time another letter for Ciano, dated Bengasi 19 August, with which was transmitted "copy of a document to the General Head of S.M.". The letter reached its destination the 20th, the average for an aerial courier.
- 76 From 5 August his burdens had been assumed by Gen. Giordano in replacement of Gen D'Aponte
- 77 G. CIANO cited Op, p 456.
- 78 Ibid, P 457
- 79 DSCS, f 180 dated 1.8.1940 of the S.M.R.E.
- 80 DSCS, f 1772 dated 8.8.1940 of the Supreme Command the same day Roatta, through Gen von Rintelen, requests an interview with representatives of the OKW, the requests had a negative outcome: the Italian-Germans conversations in the desired sense -it was answered superfluous because the Fuhrer wished a calm southern border and was not in order to offer the English a way to establish air force bases in Yugoslavia: inspections of the Yugoslavian fortifications along the German border would not have been allowed (E VON RINTELEN. Cited Op., p. 100).
- 81 DSCS, f. 1882 dated 13.8.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 82 DSCS, f2105 dated 26.8.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 83 MARIO MONTANARI, *La campagna di Grecia*" USE Rome 1980, pp. 41-42
- 84 Some time after, the 21st, Gen von Rintelen approached Badoglio in the name of Keitel in order to avoid a move against Yugoslavia and Greece (QUIRINO ARMELLINI, *Diario di guerra*, Garzanti, Milan 1946, p. 63).
- 85 On 26 August Badoglio wrote to the Viceroy: "*To determine a priori the duration of the war is practically impossible. What I can say to you is that the Germans think of being able to successfully lead to Fulfillment the invasion of England and therefore to conclude the war within the next month of October. With that the difficulties do not hide from the enterprise, than after to having accurately studied and prepared, they continuously perfect in all the particulars (...). Believe that it can be therefore concluded: we hope that the war will finish really within October, but prepare yourself to endure longer (...)*" (DSCS, f2105 dated 26.8.1940 of the Supreme Command).
- 86 Ref. CS, tele 1990-1991-1992/0p. dated 19.8.1940 hours 12.30 of Supreme Command
- 87 Ciphers indicated from Wavell at the end of July cited Dispatch p. 3001.
- 88 F.500.24028 dated 30.8.1940 of Dir. Gen. P. S. The shipments of postcards franchise exploded after the outbreak of the war were the following: 1,000,000 on 27 July with the steamship *Città di Palermo*, 1,200,000 on 17 August with the steamship *Foscarini*. At the end August 800,000 postcards were lying in wait at Naples to be forwarded to Tripoli.
- 89 Ref. CS, tele 3031/op. dated 20.8.1940 of the C.S.F .A.A.S. "*If in Rome, then, they had intentional to hold account of how much in the report was exposed - this comment of Graziani - this will sure be rendered famous* II (R. GRAZIANI!. op cited, p 68)

- 90 DSCS, tele 2036/op. dated 21.8.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 91 Ref. CS, f. 07/op dated 23.8.1940 of the relative attachment CSFAAS and documents in issue is brought back in appendix 24. R. GRAZIANI cited Op., pp 68-69
- 92 Ref. CS, f. 2180/op. dated 29.8.1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 93 Southern oases force was constituted by a single share of the grouping, and just two Libyan battalions, the Saharan battalion, the mixed tank battalion, all the units of support and the two groups of artillery In total 3.800 men, 160 quadrupeds, 500 motor vehicles then reduced to 320 (of which 250 were trucks)
- 94 DSCSAS, f. 01/207914 date 5.9.1940 of Armed forces high command, appendix 25. Bisogna to think that every shrewdness was put to work in the logistical field. However some hesitation inevitability rises. As an example, the 21st of June, Balbo had asked for 1000 trucks; Head Quartermaster confirmed the request with Rome on the 4-5 July and he was allotted of 760 units; Graziani referred it on the 5th of August to Mussolini and he approved it, even if not explicitly, in the report of the 18th of August meeting held on Cirene. But in oral saying, not only did not make mention of the 400 trucks already arrived (beyond to float an imprecise number independently from the request in argument), but even himself was paced in doubt that the 1000 hurried trucks were sufficient. In fact the document specified did not have an accounting of the damages and losses for war causes.
- To the beginning of August the motor vehicles situation in Libya was as follows: 6,500 trucks of which half were the heavy, 510 towing, 100 machine-shop trucks and tank workshop, 110 buses and vans, 230 special equipped and various, 750 tractors and caterpillars, 250 tricycle and 1,900 motorcycles. Inefficiencies for damages of various types were running around on 20%. In the report of 18 August the availability in Cyrenaica turned out 3,787 serviceable trucks, entire absorbed from the necessities of life of the units, that is to say leaving for the offensive (2,700 for major units besides a 1,000 for the chief quartermaster). The calculation had been made for the foreseen eventuality that, for the requirements of action of maneuvering, it could be rendered necessary to auto-transport at the same time all the major units of the eastern Libya. This not being so, was recovered equipment for the auto-transport of the major units taking part in the offensive. Also thinking it possible to find a greater number of motor vehicles, the situation would *perhaps* not be improved a 10t. The knot of the issue seems instead the excessive delay in the hoard amassing at Tobruk and Bardia of materials being necessary to feed the action. It is necessary to think that in two months that was feasible; when the logistical effort in order to support a offensive 100-150 kilometers reach that would have been ordinary administration.
- And also for the fuel there is some relief by behavior the Chief quartermaster asserted to Rome that some necessity in intention: in all of Cyrenaica did not exist had an self -sufficiency of two months and a half, in spite of you concentrating the greater part of the vehicles of Libya. But this autonomy did not hold account neither of the thousand trucks demands nor for the offensive. In fact, the report of 18 August emphasized that *"in case of operations, employing the single existing means, the sufficiency is reduced to a third of that indicated, in addition to losses for war events"*.
- 95 Ref. CS, f. 219/op. dated 5.9.1940 of the Chief of S.M.G.
- 96 DSCSAS, tele 3/op. dated 7.9.1940 of the Supreme Commander, appendix 26.
- 97 Ref. CS, tele 2350/op. dated 7.9.1940 of the Supreme Command. To this was followed by a second dispatch, personal, always to Badoglio: *"Received your telegram. Be sure that nobody exalts more than me your work and anywhere I speak about you with absolute Assurance"* (Ref. CS, tele 2371/op. dated 7.9.1940 of the Chief of SMG) Received tele 2350, Graziani's resignation dispatch send to Mussolini along with the explanatory letter brought back in appendix 27

- 98 DSCSAS, Recapitulation of the oral orders given by the Supreme Commander on 7.9.1940, @ 22:30 hrs.
- 99 DSCSAS, f. 0/29 op. dated 7.9.1940 of the Armed forces high command and f. 01/7351 dated 8.9.1940 Of the Commander 10th army, appendix 28.
- 100 With one small and great omission: the Libyan divisions group not received their objective of attack. Perhaps said to make amends (!).
- 101 Not considered the 7th combat group because the Ba 88 with which it was equipped revealed absolutely insufficient to whichever employment, as well as that -cannibalized for the usable parts -they became employed like shapes on the ground in order to trick the opposing reconnaissance.
- 102 the morning of the 10th Graziani noticed of the omission and invited the head of the S.M. of the Army to provide shelter, but the disadvantage repeated the following day, for which reason Berti recalled on the necessity to always hold Maletti under direct orders. It would have been better, however, to put this last one under the orders of the army.
- 103 In his diary Graziani wrote. *"At three o'clock [of 12] after six hours of anxieties and torment in order repair other the deficiencies and errors I go to sleep a king. At five they are newly on foot (...)"* and consulted generals Tellera and Miele on the eventual expediency to attack equally to north, without participation of Maletti. *"After increase consideration we concluded unanimously that it is better to make this day a pause."* R GRAZIANI Op cited, pp. 79-80.
- 104 DSCSAS, f01/7555 dated 14.9.1940 of the 10th Armed Command.
- 105 DSCSAS, f01/541 op. dated 14.9.1940, 19:25 hours.
- 106 DSCSAS, f, 01/7572 dated 14.9.1940 of the 10th Armed Command.
- 107 DSCSAS, tele. 01/550 op. dated 15.9.1940, 01:30 hrs, of the Armed forces high command
- 108 All the mobile troops -23 *Marzo* CC.NN Div., Maletti battle grouping, the tank Regiment which had been joined by the light tank battalion of Maletti, and some support of the army corps -had been placed under the directed orders of Bergonzoli for the conquest of Sidi el- Barrani.
- 109 DSCSAS, tele. 01/574 op. of the Armed forces high command to the Supreme Command.
- 110 The situation communicated from Maletti was the following. *"Battle Group Command and one 20 mm btr., one 47mm cp. at Ghot el-Sidra. Stop. Firm Saharan Btg. at Nezu el Ghirba because truck means employed by the Army Corp for Battalion transport from Es Zeilun to the Sidi Omar. Stop. A Battalion, a 65mm/17 section and a 20mm section at the Sidi Omar in expected arrival Marmarica battalion that is replacing them Stop Tank Btg. passed to the division Marmarica, 5 pieces 75mm C.K, and 6 65mm/17 in march from Nezu el Ghirba to Ghot el-Sidra and Neqb el Uadi Halfaya Stop At present I do not think therefore that of 1 btr. and 2 groups of art. incomplete and small anti-tank elements. Stop. I ask you to consider this situation abnormal".*
- 111 With the column of the right was moving the Command tanks (Gen. Babini), but without a well defined responsibility.
- 112 From *La distruzione di un esercito. La prima campagna libica (settembre 1940 febbraio 1941)*, published by the British ministry of the information on behalf of the ministry of the war.
- 113 ?
- 114 R. GRAZIANI, cited Op., p. 86.
- 115 In his time the adversary therefore wrote explicatory about our artillery: *"The enemy did not make use of his numerical superiority and of his mobility, in order to exceed the flank of our forces with his artillery, but employed with audacity and, in truth, in all of Italian actions in this field the good use of the artillery was the salient characteristic. One of the peculiarities of this artillery was constituted by its shooting mobility. Sometimes the guns talked fired from the same trucks; others, unloaded, were placed in action with remarkable rapidity although it was noticed that the precision of the shooting was sacrificed to the intensity of the fire"* (From *La distruzione di un esercito*)

116 DSCSAS, tele 01/590 dated 16.9.1940, 11:30 hours.

117 The English situation that was shown by our aerial observation " 13: 55 Hours English armored division (150 armored vehicles scattered in groups) concentrated and stopped around Bir Enda and amid Bir er Rabia and Bir Enda; a dozen armored vehicles at Bir Habata; distant movements to southeast on the Sidi el-Barrani tracks; immense fire at ten kilometers to south of Sidi el-Barrani". Evidently it was not a matter of the 7th Arm. Div., but of the large part of its advanced element, that was not able to take part this particular in battle.

118 The XXIII Corps had the following losses:

	Officers			Troops		
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Day of 13	-	3	-	7	20	-
" 14	-	1	-	14	18	2
" 15	2	-	-	14	36	-
" 16	1	8	-	12	40	1
" 17	4	6	-	37	118	3
" 18	-	1	-	-	18	1
Total	7	19	-	84	250	7

The losses reported (in total 367) were endured from the various units in the following numbers:

XXIII A.C. Command, troops employed by the A.C. or under direct command, 140; 23 *Marzo* [1st] CC.NN. Div., 187; "Maletti" Battle-group. 12; Cirene [63rd] Inf Div., 16; Marmarica [62nd] Inf Div., 12.

The "Maletti" Battle-group had for cause of the bombing the following days II and 12 losses: 14 killed (10 national and 4 Libyan), 55 hurt (3 officials, 42 nationals, 10 Libyans).

119 Dispatch cit., p. 3001.

120 DSCA, tele 01/660 dated 18.9.1940 of C.S.F.A.A.S. -appendix 29.

121 The regiment was trying several cures. On twelve Spa 38 was applied plan for the arrangement of 47/32 mm. guns and on five small vans machine-guns were installed.

122 Dispatch, cited, p. 3001.

123 G. SANTORO, cited Op., p. 326.

124 Circumstance that will be contested to it very hard, beyond just this one. Nobody in fact has made the case that Wavell and Wilson to be at Cairo and not on the front line, where was found and he was enough -O'Connor. Having been deprived of authority over command of part the 10th Army constituted, among other things, a psychological error because it continued to render Graziani responsible for events that in the end fell under the full jurisdiction of the infer or level.

125 Document appendix 30.

126 Tobruk, as usual, did not exceed 500 every day tons, but it reached at times approximately 700 tons. Bardia was under 200 tons/day.

127 The troops had received supplies for five days (four to the continuation of the units, comprised equipments front line, and one at the divisional level)

- 128 The authorized level was first defined in December at 100,000 men (13,000 in Tunisia; 47,000 in Algeria, and 40,000 in Morocco) for total of 26 Regiments of infantry, 12 of cavalry and 6 of artillery, with prohibition to obtain guns of antitank greater than 75 millimeters bore. On par they were prohibited to form tank units. However, in consideration of the possibility of a British or Free French attempt on Morocco, they were granted 5 tank battalions and another 10,000 men. As far as the Air Forces, had been authorized 435 aircraft.
- 129 Ref. CS, tele 2406/op dated 9/9/1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 130 DSCS, f2458/op dated 12/9/1940 of the Supreme Command (reprinted by M MONTANARI, *op cited*, doc. 28).
- 131 DSCSAS, tele 01/841 of the Armed forces high command, dated 24/9/1940. With it Graziani placed in evidence the problems of the fast transformation of the Sollum-Sidi el-Barrani track into a surfaced road, on the extension of the aqueduct from Bardia to Sidi el-Barrani -issue facilitated from the water recovery of dunes to Bug Bug (approximately 120 mc/day) and little more to the east (30 mc/day) -, of the caterpillars for the constitution of mobile magazines (they were necessary from Italy at least the 200 with tows) and of the transports.
- 132 They was a program of military talks at highest level between Italy and Germany
- 133 Report of the reprinted in appendix 31
- 134 G. FIORAVANZO, *cited Op.*, pp. 7-8
- 135 The oil tankers *Caucaso* and *Persiano*, as an example, Remained stopped at Tripoli for the month (August-September 1940) against impossibility for discharge
- 136 DSCS, f2493/A dated 23/9/1940 of the Supreme Command. The established procedure was followed by the N. A. Armed forces high command, kept posted from the S.M.R.E. of the loading of the steamboats, signaled to the S.M.R.M. when and which ships had to leave in relation to the deliveries to Libya. The same Armed forces high command supplied to the organization of the unloading of the steamboats in the Africans ports and gave orders to the Armed forces high command Marina N.A. of the approximate the coastal movements. This last was then communicated to the S.M.R.M. the status of the steamboats unloading and they requested the convoying to the home land.
- 137 DSCS, f. 138/5 dated 8/10/1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 138 DSCS, f2989 dated 9/10/1940 of the Supreme Command.
- 139 For the exact number 10,500 light trucks; 9,200 heavy and 2,050 towing. 30% of such trucks and 70% of the towing were of requisition (situation 15 September).
- 140 DSCS, f2743 op. dated 25/9/1940 of the Supreme Command: *"The demands from Mar. Craziani for the 10th Army must be satisfied with every precedence over other requirement and, being necessary, even to the determent of efficiency of the G. U. located in Italy (...).*
- 141 The per diem historian of the Supreme Command makes on date 29 September a personal annotation of Badoglio, which, among other things, he says: *"I have received Marshal Craziani who illustrates the situation. At 11:00 hours, during a talk with the DUCE, he had been discussing the period in which he could begin the new phase that the DUCE would wish happen in the month of October. I have expressed the opinion that cannot happen until November"* and adds to have summoned Roatta, commanding to make every effort in order to upgrade Cyrenaica and to send before October, 25 Tanks of 16 tons (meaning the M 13), 200 caterpillars and 500 trucks. Instead according to Graziani, than based on just the per diem (*op. cit. p.1 00*). *"He would arrive at Rome the 29th at 11:45 hrs and the 30th he would report to Badoglio and then to Mussolini*

142 R GRAZIANI, *op. cited*, p. 100

143 R. GRAZIANI, *op. cited*, p. 101.

144 According to Graziani the conversation took place 1st October, according to Ciano (*op. cited*, p. 468) the following day his is the more reliable the date of the 2, because on 10 October the minister of the foreign countries Spanish, Serrano Suner, reached Rome, and Ciano clearly remembered it was that day.

145 G. CIANO, *op. cited*, p. 467

146 R. GRAZIANI, *op. cited*, p. 101.

147 DSCS, note given to Mussolini 5/10/1940

148 From *La distruzione di un esercito cited*.

149 The numerical situation concerning the Italian troops in North Africa at the end of September was as follows:

1. Troops

Armed forces high command and Chief Quartermaster	13,235 men.
10th Army	127,990 men.
5th Army	80,901 men.
Units of the Sahara	3,486 men.
Total Army	225,612 men.
Other Armed Forces	18,888 men.
General total	244,500 men.

2. Equipment:

Antitank Guns	278
Antiaircraft Guns	552
Other types of Artilleries	1,489
Tanks	417
Motor vehicles of every type ""	7,693
Aircraft serviceable	437
Aircraft unserviceable	304

The relative total figures of the materials do not take account of the qualitative deficiencies. As far as the enemy, on the 13th of September the S.I.M. had told the Supreme Command the Anglo-Egyptians forces, were estimated in July at 120,000 men, were nearly doubled. The new arrivals were constituted from two Australian divisions clear detachments from Palestine, since the troops still were not well identified: 20,000 men coming from the Far East and Australia, 25,000 men from Bombay Indian and 10,000 English arrived from Great Britain via Cape of Good Hope. Altogether Wavell had at his disposal in Egypt approximately 200,000 men, of which two divisions were in Palestine and could be summoned and 40,000 Indians had disembarked or were in the course of disembarkation at Bassora.

150 M. MONTANARI, *op. cited*, p. 60.

151 G. CIANO, *L'Europa verso la catastrofe*, p. 594.

152 DSCSAS, f. 40/op. dated 6/10/1940 of the Armed forces high command.

153 The first of October a battalion of 37, 14 tons, M 13 tanks with a 47/32 Gun in the turret was disembarked in Libya, while the M 11 Tanks, of 11 tons, had one gun from 37/40 in the casemate.

154 G. CIANO, *op. cited*, p. 470.

- 155** M. MONTANARI, *op. cited*, p. 70 and seg and doc 52 This participation of Mussolini, like others, has been omitted in *"Storia di un anno"* of Mussolini, Mondadori, Milano 1944
- 156** The Syntax, the phrase in the report *"specially foreseeing that we will not stop ourselves"* we could al so be interpreted in the sense of *"especially if English thought that we could not linger ourselves"*, but the guideline is thought more probable that Mussolini to prosecute the effort in depth after a short pause at Marsa Matruh
- 157** In truth on the date of 8 October Wavell, its said, he had approximately 50,000 men, forces in Egypt excluded and not holding account influxes in route. The armament of which he had consisted of 156 field pieces, 18 medium-caliber gun, 90 antitank guns and 1,000 antitank rifles, 52 Anti-aircraft guns and 239 Bren-carriers. He instead calculated necessary, always for his 50,000 men, 380 field pieces, 50 medium-caliber gun, 320 antitank, 2,100 antitank rifles and 730 carriers, without comprising the escort (JOHN CONNELL, *Wavell, Scholar and Soldier*, Collins, London 1964, p 255-256).
- 158** I compute of the trucks sent by the Armed forces high command were mostly accounted for: 83 trucks for the XXIII Corp Command, 600 for the *Sirte* [61st], as many for the division reserve, 600 for the Libyan divisions group, 440 for the *Maletti* grouping, 186 for the artillery grouping, 416 for the supplies (2 days of provisions and water, one *unfoc* and four units fuels), 290 in reserve (10%). Within the army there were 865 unserviceable, motor vehicles equal to approximately 30% of the total of the 10th Army. The Chief Quartermaster moreover had 970 military trucks and 200 civilians
- 159** DSCS, f. 01/1500 dated 15/10/1940 of C.S.F.A.AA., appendix 32.
- 160** Q. ARMELUN1, *op. cited*, p. 119.
- 161** DSCS, f. 3198/op. dated 18/10/1940 of the Supreme Command. It must but add that second a note dated 12 October prepared from the ministry of war for Mussolini the question was in other words. In short before the beginning of the offensive the Armed forces high command had altogether asked for 5,200 trucks; they had been sent 2,173 with 353 tows and they foresaw a shipment of others 1,720 with 300 tows.
- Such a shipment program covered the demands personally made by Graziani the first of October in Rome, therefore *after* taking Sidi el-Barrani, the two heavy truck companies each of 150 motor vehicles with tows (already ready for departure); a truck company of 100 *all terrain* (ready for 15 October); 200 *Fiat* 626 trucks, 150 light, 120 vans *Fiat* 508 and one bus section (departure within the month); 500 trucks especially suitable for the colonial territories (to be ready within three months).
- A report on the usefulness or purpose of the panorama of the motor vehicles situation of R. Army on 28 October 1940:

	existing	-on order
light trucks	20,663 7,759
heavy trucks	15,099 6,699
all terrain trucks	971....568
fright trucks	2,751. -
Hauling	7,621. 1,678
tractors.	4,546. 2,084
heavy tractors	1,536. 167
ambulances	1,230. 754
machine-shop trucks	369.... 149

- 162 R GRAZIANI, *op cited*, p 108
- 163 DSCS, f. 01/1740 Op. dated 24/10/1940 of C.S.F.A.A.S. -appendix 33.
- 164 The ministry of the war had declared to be able to sending one fifty of against the two hundred requisitioned by Graziani.
- 165 Bitterly Graziani commented: *"Examinee the constitution of the armored division in a word, a figure jumps at once to the eyes, that of the motor vehicles: 2,500 only 13,000 men –by how little we have in total, between 10th Army and the Quartermaster!"*
- 166 R GRAZIANI, *op cited*, p. 113.
- 167 Existing in Cyrenaica two M-11 tank battalions and one M 13. A second M-13 battalion was arriving from Italy.
- 168 According to Graziani the construction of an aqueduct from Fort Capuzzo to Marsa Matruh and beyond was the only possible solution to the water problem. For the care therefore he had made to prepare a plan for which he had asked financing on part for the ministry of the war and an participation of the Supreme Command from the undersecretary of war for fabrications the urgent allocation of steel being necessary for the pipes and special pieces not to mention the rubber for the packing in the amounts previewed in plan (DSCSAS, f. 1837N dated 22.10.1940 of the Armed forces high command).
- 169 A study carried out for the use of the Marsa Matruh-Alexandria railway line, deserves an explicit note, one of the elements of the complex *"road"* (to restore sure and to improve in nearly all its extension), the extra *"track"* (to put into effect quickly in parallel to the *"road"*), the extra *"aqueduct"*, extra *"railroad"*. Premised a transport requirement of at least a thousand of tons to the day, he was to determine all special a railway material and to take into account the effective possibilities of Italian production at the time not to say the situation of the naval and land transports.
- The technical problem was entrusted to Eng. Lino Castellazzi of the O.M., which he resolved and they defined the technical aspects and of employment in truly an economical way the starting of the production of material -48 working trains 12 more for reserve and maneuver, composed of a naphta locomotive (a kind of flatbed with low sides, with front guide cabin) and two short flatbed wagons, with a total payload of 28 tons and an economic speed of 40 km hour -the O.M. could be built immediately since it would have used automotive *chassis* already in the course of construction. With some change of parts of the axles and the wheels the trains would have assumed the appearance and the possibilities of the normal trucks and nobody, in the ports of loading and disembarkation and during travel, could have suspected to be dealing with railway material, also because the towed wagons carne loaded on the locomotive for highway transportation.
- Reaching the railhead under its own means, in little hours the means would have been transformed into a train. The reverse transformation was fast so that became possible to introduce material railway also beyond interruptions, it also extend, the railway line with obvious advantage. Within three months the O.M. could supply 70 locomotive (numbering 10 per station serviced) and 120 wagons with a total cost of 26 million.
- 170 Q. ARMELLINI, *op. cited*, pp. 124-125.
- 171 The S.I.M. had informed of the remarkable enthusiasm aroused by the arrival of Weygand in Algeria by the French population of North Africa, putting in prominence the possibility that kind after the military expansion of those regions, around him the political current could polarize that made a leader of De Gaulle -who from London headed the free French Forces had proclaimed himself and had instituted the Council to defend the empire -never the less others for the moment were still faithful to the government of Vichy.

- 172** Memoranda of S.I.M. dated 23/10/1940 appendix 34.
- 173** It does not say that the argument was still being polished by Graziani.
- 174** Memoranda for Il Duce dated 27/10/1940 - appendix 35
- 175** Memoranda of S.I.M. dated 25/10/1940 -appendix 36.
- 176** DSCS, f. 3461 op. dated 29/10/1940.
- 177** DSCS, letter in dated 26/10/1940.
- 178** DSCS, cited f. 3198/op. dated 18/10/1940.
- 179** DSCSAS, f. 50 R.P. dated 29/10/1940 of Supreme Commander -appendix 37.
- 180** M. MONTANARI, *op. cited*, p. 212.
- 181** DSCSAS, letter in dated 1/11/1940.
- 182** Meeting minutes dated 1/11/1940 appendix 38.
- 183** DSCS, f. 7/11/1940. Appendix 39
- 184** DSCS, f. 09600/341 dated 1/11/1940 of the S.M.R.E., office ordering and mobilization.
- 185** The report of the commission had indicated 3,844 trucks: 3,180 existing and 664 to be delivered, not taking into account of equipment with the non-motorized units and of the light tractors of the artillery, where the disengagement had occurred was how many heavy trucks were used for the Auto-transport of Gun. In particular, the meeting report carried the following:
existing motor vehicles in Cyrenaica on 10/6/40 1.880
arrived from Italy from 10/6 to 8/11/40 956
yielded from the 5th Army 2,437
total available 5.273
destroyed for war causes ;... 133
unserviceable on 8/11/40 1.960
available serviceable 3.180
- 186** One infantry division ordinary numbers approximately 3,400 motor vehicles, excluded means of combat.
- 187** DSCSAS, f. 2500N dated 12/11/1940 of Armed forces high command and DSCS, f. 011659/341 dated 23/11/1940 of the S.M.R.E., office ordering and mobilitation.
- 188** It is not very clear the thoughts of Graziani. He had asked for a motorized regiment in order to form with the tanks in Cyrenaica one armored division. The 10th Bersaglieri was in course the motorized preparation by without *Solothurn* rifle Company but with one 47mm /32 guns. The motorized division of which now note is made would be, therefore, a new development.
- 189** DSCSAS, f. 69 R.P. dated 14/11/1940 of Supreme commander appendix 40.
- 190** DSCS, f. 4156/op. dated 24/11/1940 of the Chief General of S.M. appendix 41.
- 191** DSCSAS, f. 3300N dated 3/12/1940 of Armed forces high command -appendix 42.
- 192** DSCSAS, f.s.n. dated 4/12/1940 of Supreme commander appendix 43.
- 193** M. MONTANARI, *op. cited*, pp. 335-337.
- 194** To south of the Marmarica [62nd] Inf. Div., that went from Sidi Omar to the embankment of Sollum, they had reconstituted the garrisons of Bir esc Sceferzen, Fort Maddalena and Gam um Grein, everyone a company of the frontier guard strongly reinforced with infantry-support weapons.
- 195** Constitution: 27 officials, 420 troops, 27 M Tanks, 6 -47mm/32 guns, 4 -65mm/17, 6 - 20mm machine-guns and 37 motor vehicles.

- 196** Constitution 17 officials, 256 troops. 4 -47mm/32 guns, 4 -65mm/17 guns and 4 -75mm/27, 4 -20mm machine-guns and 29 motor vehicles.
- 197** According the office of information the 10th Army was dealing with two armored car companies, a tank squadron, a battalion of artillery and, of support, one or two squadrons of the 7th Hussars, for total 60-70 armored cars and tanks.
- 198** Italian losses numbered to 12 died (3 officers). 52 hurt (4 officers) and 16 missing; five tank destroyed and two 75 mm. Guns. The English assessed results of at least 10 armored cars destroyed

CHAPTER III

The First British Counter Offensive

1. THE POLITICAL-MILITARY SITUATION.

The late summer and above all autumn 1940 saw in the two fields a sensitive change of direction. From the Italian side, the campaign of Greece, begun on the basis of revealing then nonexistent political guarantees, moved attention and worry towards the Balkans; the operations in the Mediterranean extinguished every illusion on the validity of the theory of the *Fleet in being* (fleet with potential), without moreover to provoke an effective alternative, and the vicissitudes of December in North Africa opened the eyes finally on what it mechanized war in the desert meant. Germany, after the renunciation to the invasion of Great Britain, realistically holding to consider and with always greater insistence a participation in the offensive towards the Suez Canal. England, when it appeared clear victorious in skies of the Channel and the **Isle**, it passed with energy to the expansion of the theater of operations of the Middle East. That both contenders in North Africa were given orders to improve their respective position was natural; but while English did not manifest at the moment decisive sights, even because they were overestimating the consistency of the Army of Berti, the Italian were having vain ambition or of an offensive importance. Unfortunately abdicated, as it has been viewed, the diamond tip offered by Hitler. Given the immediate consequences of such initial renunciation, it is opportune to recapitulate the contacts and the intentions, explicit or masked, of the two Axis allies.

On 8 August Gen. Marras had communicated to the Comando Supremo the answer of the OKW visa via the supplies of armament material. In particular, Germany declared not to be able to send their tanks and motor vehicles, those available being entire absorbed for the refitting of armored and motorized major units and for the replacement of the equipment of major units in the field ⁽¹⁾. As far as war booty materials, those of the French could be yielded, however two large drawbacks were introduced: the census and the efficiency of these means, what which in itself would not take a short time, and their transport to Italy, inasmuch as the railway lines were still largely

broken and heavily engaged with the movements of unit and prisoners. Also in order to please Rumania, the German government was reserved to cede only to her the Polish material, intending with that of the French to supply first of all their own necessities, then to those of the Italians and, in third request, those of Rumania. Very clearly, therefore. Keitel, in the guise of explanation, had observed that Italy should not fear any great enemy offensive, whereas Germany was forced to conserve in full efficiency a great army, but finding that "the war economy of the Germanic high command *had made clear that Italian necessities of automotive material did not have to be urgent, since was underway an important supply of motor vehicles to the German Armed Forces partly from Italian industry*", probably the supply demanded in compensation for coal ⁽²⁾.

To this rather evasive attitude, which joined shortly after the negative answer to the proposals of Roatta circa the aid for an eventual participation in Yugoslavia and the sharp political halt formulated by Ribbentrop, taken in the second half of August a different demeanor. Seeing the possibility vanish of an invasion very soon of Great Britain, the OKH, on their own initiative, suggested to Hitler to send an armored Corp to Libya. Calculating the provisions necessary in order prepare the troops for overseas and transport them let alone the logistic organization, the employment of major unit could be anticipated for December. Hitler received the idea, but limited the entity of the forces to just one armored brigade ⁽³⁾, Given this orientation, he demands that Badoglio introduced on 31 August newly, through Marras, found acceptance very different from the previous ones.

In absence of Keitel, the military attaché spoke with Gen. Jodl, operational head of the General Staff of the OKW, which he was shown as obvious -he was persuaded of the Italian requirements and, that also he intended to supply an answer within some day, wanted to expose some personal thoughts on the theater of operations of the Mediterranean, in the hypothesis that the German operations against English " *could not come to an end before the next autumn*". In such case it would be convent to use the winter, season of limited rendering for war initiatives in the comparisons of the British islands, in order "to liquidate the situation in the Mediterranean, that is to occupy Egypt and Palestine, to destroy or to hunt the English naval forces from the Mediterranean, to occupy Gibraltar". The elimination of the Mediterranean Fleet would have had political and military consequences of the first order,

between which the full control of the communications in the Mediterranean and the obvious reflection in the comparisons of the French North Africa and Spain. Liberate the Mediterranean (the English fleet probably would escape through the Red Sea) the Italian naval forces would have joined those of the Germany in the Atlantic in order to prevent the supplying of Great Britain and also in order to face the British naval forces, placing her fleets that the combined Axis would have found themselves in advantage regarding their adversary. For the operations in Egypt, Jodl said that Germany could not allow only materials, but also with a Corp of armored troops: or two divisions could be ready at the ports of boarding within six weeks from the decision. " Of course - *he added - the matter that must be weighed by who has the decision of the operations, also in relationship to transports and supplying*". And he pointed out to the possibility of the shipment of German units not at one time, but after a first thrust forward in Egypt on part of the 10th Army. Marras was limited to insist so that help be provided regardless of the topic under discussion and, to inform Badoglio, he observed that the proposals of Jodl, in part political considerations, referring to the eventuality that a Italian victory in Egypt was not imminent and that if the German contribution, that could be extended to aerial units, was accepted, it was necessary to consider the logistic considerations carefully. In any case, he suggested, it seemed opportune that the two issues, of the cession of the materials and the shipment of a major unit, were arriving distinct capacities, emphasizing the urgency of the former.

All in all, therefore, Marras was rather lukewarm towards the idea manifested by Jodl⁽⁴⁾. Badoglio transmitted the letter to the General Staff of the Army and Roatta, in his turn, asked the opinion of Graziani, specifying the good terms of the choice to do and advising that Italian production would have allowed the formation of one M-13 tank battalion every two months. The alternative posted from Roatta were three: assemble more German armored divisions with relative logistic weight; assemble one reduced major unit; supply from German side of 150-200 heavy tanks, with which to carefully form three or four Italian battalions, and a sure number of heavy armored car⁽⁵⁾.

Graziani has pronounced after the occupation of Sidi el-Barrani:

"The answer is implicit in my n.01/841 of the 24th directed to Stamage⁽⁶⁾.
Use with organic unit somewhat revised is doubtfully useful But it can only co-exist in a function appropriate logistics organization with current means it is not possible to realize.

I reserve clarification variants for particular adaptation this theatre operations environment. Please copy this at Stamage" ⁽⁷⁾.

In short: the arrival of German units was useful but not indispensable, however at that moment the logistic order did not allow their employment. But in Berlin the issue was taken in insistent consideration and quietly introduced as the only solution. Marras wrote on 25 September to the ministry of war reporting a new talk he had the previous day with Keitel, which he had openly declared that Germany was not in a position to supplying neither arms nor motor vehicles, being herself in the same condition of "*extreme need*". He could have yielded some war booty materials, moreover still to be defined, but notable time would have been necessary for refit them and deliver them to serviceability. The thing being therefore, that the OKW thought it convenient to send to North Africa entire armored units, rather than only tanks, in order to complete a determined effort and, jointly, to hunt England from the Mediterranean. For Gibraltar, then, was considering the enterprise feasible acting with surprise with limited forces but prepared ad hoc, following an agreement with Franco ⁽⁸⁾. Mussolini and Badoglio they were inclined to receive anything a this point of view and when (5 October) Gen. von Rintelen represented the desire of the OKW to send to Libya for three or four weeks a military commission headed by Gen. Kircheim for the study of the general organization of the colonial troops, tried to leave the thing to the fall.

Between the many circumstances in which he made clarity the defect in the relationships between Rome and Berlin, this undoubtedly is not minor. From Germanic side the talk at Brennero between Mussolini and Hitler seems to have provoked the conviction that the participation of German troops in the operations in Egypt was what is now obvious ⁽⁹⁾. In fact some day latter a new dispatch from Marras brought the issue back on the table: Keitel had declared to attribute the maximum importance to the occupation of the Suez Canal during next winter and in the presence of forces of the Reich in such an enterprise. For discussion, the objective of Gibraltar could pass into the second line is since really of little urgently is for the ambitions manifested by Spain on all of Morocco and the department of Oran. The composition of the contingent had to be specified

after a overview in Cyrenaica and directed agreements with a representative of the OKW, Gen. von Thoma. Themselves would have been sent, approximately, of one Armored division with 120 tanks (therefore somewhat reduced), strong assault guns and a fortified of logistic apparatus⁽¹⁰⁾. Evidently it was not possible to oppose refusal to the contact taken and on 15 October von Thoma reached Rome. It appeared clearly to the Italian military experts that at Brennero Mussolini must have accepted, clearly with mental reservations, the thesis of Hitler. Gen. Annellini wrote, in the fact, in his Diary:

"It's the German mission von Thoma, general of quick troops, for dealing with the German concourse in Libya. While the directives of the Duce would exclude, it seems that at Brennero, upon German request, it has been established already there are no simple means of shipment, but of organic motorized and armor units".⁽¹¹⁾

However the logistic aspects of shipment were studied jointly⁽¹²⁾. The 20th the heads of mission went to Northern Africa for a fastest visit of a pair of days, thereafter he returned to Berlin. On much reported from the memories of the interested parties. It put in evidence that the determining problem in an enterprise of the sort was that one of the supplying, not only for enemy difficulties but for the desert atmosphere, but also because the British fleet had dominion of the Mediterranean. It would not have been possible to maintain in North Africa a German contingent and fortify the Italian 10th army. In conclusion: the winning paper was represented for the armored troops, more than four armored divisions were not possible to supply with safety for the total duration of an offensive pushed up to the Nile and these four divisions had to be German. Then the event could be achieved. The infantry was absolutely useless and only served to complicate the onerous task of logistical supply. Always according to von Thoma, Hitler observed of being able to deprive more than one armored division, to that the general would have replied that in such case was appearing thing more tests to renounce the entire idea to send units to Libya.

"My observation -remembered von Thoma -he went into a temper. His intention on the proposed shipment of German troops to Africa was political. He feared that Mussolini could pass on other hand if Germany did not help to harden the resistance. But he wanted to send a limited contingent the much more possible.

Hitler thought that the Italians could do it alone in Africa,

with a little aid on part of the Germans. He was expecting too much from them (...)"
 (13)

In essence, for von Thoma the German participation was indispensable in order to resolve the issue, but if it had been reduced to a single division, as well as it was worth abdicate there given the insufficient esteem that he had of the Italians as soldiers. Besides that, I pointed out the possible about face of Mussolini is too obviously based on knowledge of the events back to deserve credibility. And his affirmation that is also strange von Brauchitsch and Halder were decidedly contrary to involving themselves in the Mediterranean: it can be true, but it depends on the moment in which such idea was expressed. In fact it is strengthened that the first suggestion to send an Armored Corps to Africa was of the OKH in August of 1940⁽¹⁴⁾. In any case in Rome von Rintelen returned to the charge at the General Staff of the Army so that German personal could flow into the peninsula in order to prepare for overseas shipment, but on 29 October Mussolini decided to formally decline to Hitler every aid for the attainment of Marsa Matruh. In the meantime, Keitel who in spite of the solicitations of von Rintelen had always refused to receive the desire of Badoglio to a strategic examination the situation between the militaries⁽¹⁵⁾ -he was induced to the encounter. Badoglio, defined a timeline and date, wrote to Marras to direct him well in advance. He announced his own convictions: considered the disproportion of forces in North Africa the aid of the German armored division was "*almost null*"; English would not have agreed to give the great defensive battle to Marsa Matruh, on the contrary at the margins of the Delta; the maximum objective for Graziani was Marsa Matruh, reaching which and there he would have arranged to make life impossible at Alexandria for the *Mediterranean Fleet* with German cooperation "in as much Stuka aircraft and at least equal to that which we posted in the North". This was the Italian plan:

"Here's to which I have called this meeting: to make good points about the Armored Division's no one knows just what I need to do with aviation, with very big bombs to the port of Alexandria-and nothing else.

That if the Germans don't see another solution of the war in the Mediterranean, I can't see it with the hammering of England but with the invasion of the island.

About Greece he was perhaps better to avoid her, now ours availabilities are the most insufficient and given the void of aid that up to now they have given to us

their ally - but in the situation that has given the operation appeared inescapable "⁽¹⁶⁾.

Certain arguments appear widely debatable, others are disagreeable to hear them. But at Innsbruck there was no contrast. The talks were carried out in two successive days. On 14 November began with Keitel premising that "*in the German judgment the war is won*" (!) and going around the rather wide horizon to the politico-military situation. Then it passed to Greece and to the Mediterranean. On this last argument ⁽¹⁷⁾ he exposed the thesis that the OKW had embraced holding account the very thought of Hitler who had been reported by von Thoma. The continuation of the offensive on Marsa Matruh on the first of December was seen possible "*with safety of success*", also without the aid of German tanks, inasmuch as the English "*will not ever accept a great battle in the desert*"; reaching Marsa Matruh, the offense would be in range of Alexandria not only with *Stuka* but also with aerial minelayers; he was interested, finally, to know if the Comando Supremo meant to continue the operations until Alexandria. Question, this, probably tendentious. Badoglio said during the following day. In the next day to thank his interpreter confirmed that:

"(...) According to the last news, the English forces in Egypt amass 250,000 men who will probably become 300,000 before the end of the year (...). Therefore that being the case, we can only go until Marsa Matruh. (...) for this operation do not have need of the German armored division.

At Marsa Matruh the English has constructed an entrenchment. We will attack and we will conquer it. Then we will have the desert to rear as well as have the English. Arriving at Marsa Matruh I mean put things in order as well, since I cannot be made to step backward. From Marsa Matruh to Alexandria there are 250 km. With bombing aircraft, escorted by fighters, I can daily bomb the port of Alexandria".

As far as carrying on the offensive towards the Delta, he pointed out to the uselessness to demonstrate that with 150,000 men he could not attack 300,000, the latter having to the rear supplies while he had desert. On the other hand, even if he had wanted to increase the forces in North Africa, he would not have been in a position to feed them. Keitel agreed. Bearing in mind his statements at the meeting, his consent, or rather the full identity of

views was amazing. At Nuremberg he will declare: *"the Italians were therefore pretentious as they did not ask us for more troops and Badoglio refused two armored divisions. During a talk that I had with him at Innsbruck, he expected that the tanks could not be employed in Libya (...)"*, but not a single word of the long minutes can provide inspiration for doubting his consent may well total that his views were at odds with respect to those of Badoglio, inasmuch as he had attributed *"maximum importance to the occupation of the Suez Canal before next winter & participation of Germanic forces"* - as Marras had reported - however he did not open mouth on that subject. Even if on 17 November, what is endured after the talks, Marras wrote to the ministry of war: *"The OKW recognizes the necessity not to send our own troops to Egypt until the occupation of Marsa Matruh. It wishes to know if; being heavily engaged also in Greece, Italy means, after the occupation of Marsa Matruh, to push to forward with the offensive until to Alexandria and Suez Canal "*⁽¹⁸⁾, question was preempted by events.

The meeting cannot be considered satisfactory. The occasion to send to the void the British offensive of December was not only lost, but also that one to place a heavy mortgage on the race towards the canal and against time. Both leaders had reason to draw a strategic plan for the Mediterranean, one because by now the invasion of Great Britain was set back and the other because the Egyptian theater was decisive for the control of the Mediterranean, where on 11 November -hardly three days before the encounter -the British air raid on Taranto had decidedly modified the ratio of the naval forces, none strove to set up the coalition war. In truth one watching of the encounter felt the need to formulate his own opinion explicitly: von Rintelen. Returning to Rome, he dispatched to the OKW a report in which, with extreme clarity, he supported that English from their bases of Alexandria, Malta and Gibraltar dominated the entire basin of the Mediterranean; that Italian East Africa was cut off and there was just wondering when it would fall; that Graziani with his eight divisions on foot was always at Sidi el Barrani and had given Wavell time to prepare a counter-offensive considered imminent and concluded asserting that Italy was not in a position alone to lead the war in the theater of operations of the Mediterranean and that an Italian disaster could have influenced unfavorably on the German conduct of war⁽¹⁹⁾. Summoned immediately to Berlin, von Rintelen received a dry reprimand,

evidently under the impression of "*pessimism*" to the Romans, he had written. But it was the mouth the Prophet.

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It is not easy to fully render an account of evolution of the Italian strategic attitude in the theater of operations of the North Africa without word to the naval events. The battle of Punta Stilo (9 July) had provoked a change of direction in the conduct of the operations in the Mediterranean.⁽²⁰⁾ The indecisive outcome and found the poor efficiency of naval and air cooperation, to whose ardent concern of the controversies, inspired the Supermarina to very cautious behavior that was not modified when the *Littorio* and *Vittorio Veneto* entered into the Fleet. The such confirmation of excessive precaution was cited on the occasion of Operation *Hats*. After the demands for reinforces been made by Cunningham, after a very not unsatisfying experience of Punta Stilo, the Admiralty arranged the transfer to Alexandria of the cruiser *Kent* from the Indian Ocean and of the battleship *Valiant*, the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* and the cruisers *Calcutta* and *Coventry*, equipped with radar for the discovery of aircraft, from Great Britain. The operation engaged all the British naval forces in the Mediterranean. The four ships of the reinforcements (Force F) coming from United Kingdom approached Malta escorted until to the channel of Sicily by part⁽²¹⁾ of Force H of Adm. Somerville, while moving from Alexandria for the encounter Cunningham with body of the *Mediterranean Fleet*: the battleships *Warspite* and *Malaya*, the aircraft carriers *Eagle*, 5 cruisers and 13 naval destroyers, that were also useful for the circumstance in order to escort a convoy of three steamships with supplies to Malta. The two groups of warships in motion towards the central Mediterranean were quickly sighted by Italian reconnaissance, but not the convoy; consequently, the Supermarina thought an attack on the Sicilian or Ionian coasts imminent from part of united enemy forces and ordered the sortie of the 1st fleet (Adm. Campioni) and by the 2nd fleet (Adm. Jachino) as well as the performance of two offensives alignments of submarines in the two basins of the Mediterranean.

The morning of the 31st the entire Italian fleet sailed to encounter the enemy: 4 Battleships⁽²²⁾, 12 cruisers and 34 naval destroyers, a superior force therefore to those of the British singularly considered. But the constraints imposed by the Supermarina (hour of departure, route, speed

20 knots, acceptance of the tactical contact only if before 19:00 hours) were such to make a seriously doubt of the intention to face the English and rather to induce to think that wanted an action exclusively in proximity of the Italian coast. In fact, with the foretold limits the fleet could reach at the maximum to the height of Cape Matapan, that is to say to the north of the Alexandria-Malta line. Also the discovery of the convoy on part of the aircraft of Rhodes did not modify the intention of the Supermarina, who towards 14:00 ordered Campioni to reverse course at 16:00 in case if the impossible contact had not happened. It is also true that in the evening Cavagnari ordered the fleet to sortie the next morning, but with the task "*to engage the enemy forces north of Malta- Zakynthos line*". Therefore also the second sortie, interception, what's more, due to weather conditions that did not allow an extensive aerial reconnaissance was empty. The morning of September 2nd the *Mediterranean Fleet* with the convoy arrived safe and sound at Malta and in the night on the 3rd departed again for Alexandria. For a week the English forces had been at sea escorting a low speed convoy, for the first time naval ships were in passage from the western basin to the eastern of the Mediterranean. Perhaps Italy lost the best occasion for intervention.

The mood of bitterness and discontent that was disseminated on the ships was perceived by Cavagnari, that requested the Comando Supremo illuminate visa via the line of conduct for the follow events. Badoglio answered with a long letter in which, after rather a debatable numerical comparison among the opposing naval forces, he listed the tasks of the R. Marina -tasks summarized to the simple passive defense of the coasts and the traffic with Libya and Albania -and he declared them until then well acquitted. Then frankly reached dubious conclusions:

"The two opposing fleets have in consequence, although the English double ours, carried out the same set of actions.

Looking at the results it must be concluded that the scale is more favorable for us.

The losses endured and damage received by the fleets are nearly equivalent.

Who would have most interest to modify the such state affairs? Obviously the more powerful navy, that is to say the English.

We should hope that the current situation, in which, despite being the weaker, we can correspond in full to the missions entrusted to the marina, is always maintained in this shape. I do not see therefore some reason in order to change the policy

so far followed.

The naval battle can be originated from two causes:

- 1) encounter between enemy Fleets of which one tries to prevent to the other the execution of a mission;
- 2) determined search of a squadron of the opposing naval force to destroy it.

The first case can happen at any moment as occurred in the short action of Punta Stilo. In this case our navy will face, if there is resolution probability, the fight with extreme decision.

The second case it is not in our possibilities since we are the weaker. If it will affect the English navy we will be ready confront the chance.

Conceiving a naval battle as an end in itself is an absurdity. It is not worth the pain to talk about.

Conclusion: follow the path trodden so far" ⁽²³⁾.

At the end of that same month of September the necessity of reinforcing forces and supplies for Malta pushed Cunningham to again take to the sea with two cruisers, on which he had boarded personnel and materials, escorted by the battleships *Warspite* and *Valiant* and the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*. The naval force was sighted at the height of Sidi el-Barrani the morning of the 29th, Cavagnari spoke quickly to Badoglio, proposing to sortie the fleet from Taranto. Badoglio agreed ⁽²⁴⁾, but, still, he sent orders to Campioni that did not allow the interception of enemy ⁽²⁵⁾ and in the night on the 30th, the Italian fleet returned to base, after to have consumed vast amounts of fuel oil and to having exposed themselves to possible submarine attacks of while Cunningham reached Malta undisturbed and two days latter he departed for Alexandria without difficulty. This time the sense of dissatisfaction about the cautions placed in the naval movements was therefore obvious that first of October, Cavagnari approached Taranto in order to personally expose the ranking commanders to a more elevated criteria adopted for the employment of the fleet. In the meeting held aboard of the *Littorio*, he illustrated the general situation, the directives of the Comando Supremo, the insufficiency of the aerial reconnaissance and concluded that:

"(...) indirect permanent protection of communications with Libya is possible only by very existence of our principal naval forces, whose only potential attitude constitutes already a brake to opposing initiative" ⁽²⁶⁾.

But this criterion was reached starting from a rather dubious premise: supporting, in other words, the inferiority of the Italian fleet regarding the *Mediterranean Fleet*, which at that time was not accurate, and denying the probability to face only part of the English fleet, that instead it had already happened twice. Adm. Jachino, unconvinced from the revelation of the Chief of the G.S. of the Navy, prepared a memorandum that he delivered upon his departure from Taranto, 9 October ⁽²⁷⁾. The memorandum, very explicit, put to the question the validity of the directives on the conduct of the war at sea -that it seemed prohibited compulsorily of employment beyond clear restrictive limits, whatever the size of the enemy forces at sea -and supported the Italian conditions better than those of the British. A few days later Cavagnari replied in written very curtly. In conclusion, the precaution continued to inspire the sorties of our fleet and the resolution, not separate from that dose of fortune that gladly is accompanied to the decision, the employment of the British forces. On 28 October had beginning the campaign in Greece. The first immediate English answer was the occupation of the bay of Suda on Crete (1st November), a move that gave London the much certainly for Malta and had a heavy meaning for the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Taking account also of it, on 4 November the enemy began so-called operation *MB. 8*: a complex series of movements of convoys and subsidiary operations, including operation *Coats* comprised the transport operation of troops to Malta from Great Britain with warships that subsequently had to pass to the *Mediterranean Fleet* ⁽²⁸⁾. At dawn of the 11th Cunningham sailed from Malta. He had to do two things before returning to Alexandria: an aerial raid on Taranto and one of cruisers on the channel of Otranto. Both succeeded. The sea flank of Graziani was decidedly under British control. And, consequently, from the Italian side an atmosphere of no-confidence weighed on the possibilities of naval support to operations in Egypt-Cyrenaica ⁽²⁹⁾ as well as of overseas supplies.

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In North Africa was describe the ground on which the two sides would soon have been faced in order to even meet a successful advanced to every a more rose-colored hope and another unexpected failure from the more pessimists. The dimensions of the interested area were remarkable: the Egyptian western desert

and the Cyrenaica region. From Marsa Matruh to el-Agheila it runs approximately 900 kilometers; from Apollonia to Gialo, in the interior, approximately 450. The Egyptian western desert extends from the valley of the Nile to the Libyan border meeting with the Marmarico hinterland. Overlooks the sea to east of Sollum about a rocky coast, indented, a little jagged, lagoon. Presents a flat, hard-bottomed and arid, with an altitude ranging between the 50 and the 150 meters and a depth that gives about 5-10 kilometers extends between Marsa Matruh and Sidi el Barrani, extends gradually, until reaching a maximum of some thirty kilometers to the west of Sidi el-Barrani in order then slowly to diminish until to nothing, nearly, to Sollum. The limit of such coastal strip is given by an immense escarpment, overlooking the plain, that from about Bardia continues towards south-east for about eighty kilometers ending beyond the area of Bir Sofafi and therefore slopes towards the sea and eastward to the inclined plain. To south of the embankment exists an immense limestone plateau of the maximum altitude of 220 meters, rocky, rugged and covered in sand dunes disposed in long chains in kind oriented towards north-northwest. The stony platform continues with the only indicator of Marmarica. The only element pointer of the passage from one to the other atmosphere was the wide border obstruction approximately six meters, that runs from Bardia for more than two hundred kilometers towards south: four rows of iron poles, a meter and a half high, planted on a concrete base, to which were affixed strands of barbed wire.

Cyrenaica introduces varied aspects. It enunciates, first of all, the plateau of Barca, a squat peninsula comprised of natural limestone between Benghazi and Bomba, of modest altitude (approximately 250 meters), where the two relief of the area are raised *gebel el-Achdar* at the 450-650 meters, on the northern margin of which Cirene and to the whose center rises the more elevated zone, where is born Sidi Marabutto di Mohamed el-Homasi. The plateau of Barca falls to the north on the single sea level space for a thin coastal strip between Tolemaide and Derna, but to the West this strip is increased quickly, reaching a score of kilometers to the height of Benghazi and opening into a wide plain in the area of Agedabia, where connected with the lowland of the Sirtica, steppe-like, in part desert, at times swampy -especially in vicinity of the coast -and recorded, with parallel course, from the *Wadi el -Faregh*. To south of the plateau the region of Balte is spread, a zone furrowed from numerous *Wadis*, than in the rainy season are transformed in temporary ponds, and still more to southerly there is the Serir, a great pebbly desert, to a medium altitude of 150 meters, cut, in the

sense of the Parallels, from a depressed furrow, sometimes below the sea level, *called furrow of the oases*: the alignment of the oasis of Marada, Gialo, Giarabub, and Egypt, at Siwa The Serir borders seamlessly to the Northeast with the Marmarica, placed between Bomba and the meridian of Bardia. The Marmarica has an arid coastal strip, more than a few kilometers deep, carved in Meridian direction from many dry and *uidian* marked and with a coastline moved close to this range along the sea there is a desert and steppe plateau, which soon becomes Rocky and goes to the Sahara.

In such a natural environment the Libyan coast road, the via Balbia, stood out because it was the only existing paved roadway, either because all the main centers were located on it (Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk, Bardia) and finally because these towns were also ports. The road continued into Egyptian territory: from Bardia to Fort Capuzzo and Sollum, then another 80 km to Sidi Barrani by paved road from we built after the initial advance, then 140 kilometers up to Marsa Matruh partly paved road but seriously damaged by the British during their retreat. Needless to say, this large artery was considered the main axis of any effort toward Egypt or to Tripolitania. Though the Egyptian Western desert the Marmarica and also a Cyrenaica plateau were widely practicable not only tracked and half-track vehicles but also wheeled means while claiming that the feasibility, late and poorly understands Italian commands, special measures for the rubber type vehicle to cover the installation of armored vehicles and hardened compasses, for movement down The sandy sea, tall up to about 50 centimeters, moved enveloped the vehicle. Any means heaving a trail of sand dust, so everyone wanted their own track created in the desert a broad movement also strip a mile where the vehicles sailed at an average speed of 10-15 kilometers per hour. If when the *Khamsln* blew, which happens for whole days and pretty much year-round, the sandstorm was impalpable powder clouds swirl by reducing the visibility to five or six meters and making it difficult for human breath Only interruption was the abrupt and unexpected impact with spikes of rock outcrop. To move it so the compass and training to act with broad autonomy. To fight to get used to not having support points if not temporary and *ad hoc*, formed to consider the strongpoints just like maneuver hinges and

not as positions to be defended to the hilt by taking into account everything-and the British the comprehended long before us-coastal axis saw scaled its importance, since the main tracks bought sum relevance to circumvent resistance backed by the sea front and achieve on shorter distances than those permitted by the coast. Between them, Sollum -el Adem-el-Benghazi and Mechili Tmimi (Southeast of Bomba)-el Mechili-Ajdabiya, in addition to internal guidelines Siwa-Marsa Matruh, Siwa-Giarabub-el Adem Tobruk. From this point of view the crossroads of el-Adem and el-Mechili assumed particular tactical importance.

In those circumstances, you can move on to consider opposing dispositions. In the Italian camp had come growing disagreement between Graziani and Berti. The first generic or issuing hints sometimes entered into the minutes; the second, while not specifically replicating, giving the impression of dropping the observations. Therefore on 20 October Graziani called for measures to make the advanced deployment "*an organic whole maneuverable (...) facing the eventuality that the enemy could take by complete surprise either of its constituent sections*" ⁽³⁰⁾, while Berti, circulating directives consequential risk minimized based on the fact that "*whenever we take action it's [the enemy]who break contact immediately and avoids the fight*" ⁽³¹⁾ and so on 2 November Graziani called to replace at Sidi Barrani the 23 *Marzo* given the low morale and fatigue that this demonstrated, with another Division, while Berti responded by not recognizing this necessity But, in essence, mid-November had accepted the idea that the enemy could precede the new leap forward of the army and that, therefore, in addition to the ongoing measures for expedient offensive treat both the defense around Sidi Barrani is predicting a counter-offensive.

It is objectively difficult to harmonize arrangements so conflicting and charges move in retrospect to Graziani-and was rejected for having adopted a position that was neither offensive nor defensive. The discourse is actually much broader and invests the imprinted the offensive into Egyptian territory. From purely defensive point of view there is no doubt that stay at the embankment of Sollum would have been better, although from the winding would be equally possible at Sidi to el-Barrani, indeed, and Marsa Matruh if reached, a static infantry defense

in the desert and the sea enemy had little optimistic hopes, especially in view of the risks of supplies. Furthermore, the assumed formation at Sidi el-Barrani they persuaded neither Graziani, who is always concerned about any British RAID on 17 November attracted the attention of Berti on the fact that "*an enemy attempt could be made in the void between Cyrene and the Maletti group, in the direction of Dir Enba*" ⁽³²⁾. This led to the Nov. 19 fighting. British patrols had already reported the existence of a vast area of silence between Nibeuia and the eastern ridge of Sollum foothills and this had prompted O'Connor to deepen reconnaissance to locate up to what point was the gap in Italian. The conflict, therefore, was essentially *tasting* from part of the British and *cleanliness* from part of the Italian side. In front of the comment by someone that was predictive enough combat to induce to retreat on the Ridge up to Halfaya, Graziani could later argue rightly that at that point the episode wasn't enough to justify a retreat. But had to impose precautionary measures, which probably would serve little but anyway would make success more difficult enemy. It was a strange situation according to Graziani, therefore on the 17th he wrote to Berti of the uncontrolled gate; on the 27th, inasmuch as the Corps Commander had yet done nothing, returned to the office and

"I order that he constituted a new stronghold between the *Cirene* Division and the Maletti group, *after having personally spoken* to the Commander of the 21st Army Corps, General Spatocco, on the 26th, and having given him explicit orders" ⁽³³⁾.

It doesn't really seem that things were exactly saying, mandatory. In fact, the letter from Chief of staff to the Comando Superiore, Gen. Tellera as, has a very different sound:

"(..) his Excellency, the Marshal supreme commander, please look into the appropriateness of reducing the existing gap between Raggruppamento "*Maletti*" and "*Cirene*" Division (about 30 km) in order to prevent possible infiltration of enemies mechanized means.

It appears can achieve the purpose by occupying the area of hill 192 (West of Bir Enba-map 1: 100,000) with a detachment (provided perhaps by the Division "Catanzaro").

On this topic the Excellency Marshal entertained

yesterday his Excellency Gen Spatocco, new Commander of the Bug Bug sector " ⁽³⁴⁾.

Probably all movements for the impending offensive, such as the new grouping of forces and the formation of a truck regiment for the Army and armed reconnaissance carried out by columns of *Cirene* and Maletti without encountering enemy elements led to Gen. Gariboldi-replacing Berti, when absent by license ⁽³⁵⁾-to attach importance and urgency related to the uncontrolled passage. However there were discussions and on 5 December Gariboldi forwarded to the Comando Superiore a study of Gen. Spatocco with some observations that is concluded with a fundamental question:

"In my opinion especially a matter of time. If you have to stay much in the overall situation during the occupation [of current positions], make up the cornerstone of hill 192 can be useful because it connected our troops. If it has to be a transitional situation, might agree to give it up, for now, to act at an opportune moment" ⁽³⁶⁾.

Ultimately, wondering Gariboldi, shall we attack or remain on the defensive? and how long will this hold? To keep in mind that Graziani had issued on the 25th an order for the new grouping of forces "*in order to better ensure the command action in the current situation with a view to future operations*" ⁽³⁷⁾.

The operative part of the 10th army was as follows:

- a. I sector (Sidi Barrani), entrusted to the Libyan divisions Group Command, facing East;
- b. II sector (Bug Bug) southwest of previous, supported with the right to the eastern ridge of foothills Sollum, assigned to the XXI Army Corps;
- c. III sector (Sollum) guarding the "base" of the army: Bardia - Fort Capuzzo, entrusted to the XXIII Corps.

As you can see, the formula of articulation in defensive sectors suggested an intention, while everyone was aware of preparations for the offensive on Marsa Matruh. As for the British aims, on 30 November S.I.M. furnished a large synthesis of the political-military situation, emphasizing the particular delicacy of moment

(in Albania, things were very bad and the crisis-Mussolini Badoglio was now known). In respect of the enemy forces in Egypt they were detected a significant increase in the effectives, considered on 300,000 men, including Egyptians; the wide availability of mechanized transport and the recent establishment of new armored units, equipped with materials specifically judged appropriate to act in the desert. From what was inferred the possibility of the beginning of an offensive English shortly. Even the command of the 10th Army had direct news that incorporate the framework set by the SIM, however formulated various hypotheses about the intentions of Wavell:

- “- the enemy believes imminent our offensive and prepares to violently hamper it;
- The enemy came out in force on the front to mask for a period of crisis due to the departure of forces for Greece;
- The enemy makes a normal change of units reinforcing the deployment to ease the service of observation of the units in the line;
- The enemy wants to try an limited range action against of some of our defense."

In its assessment of the degree of reliability of the above assumptions, the Command of the Army, while not excluding the possibility of an offensive that had promised the limited purpose of a local success to be exploited for propaganda, it was more inclined to believe the most likely one of three assumptions. All in all, we have to admit some uncertainty, not so much because of the forecast behavior. On the one hand all the commands great unity remained focused on the outline of the offensive in preparation: the XXI Corps was to advance along the direction of Sidi el-Barrani - Marsa Matruh, bypassing the Libyan divisions, while the Maletti grouping, the dependencies of the Comando Superiore (?), which would operate on the right wing north of the Qattara Depression and, to circumvent the defenses of Marsa Matruh. On the other hand no one escaped certain threatening symptoms, corroborated on December 7 by information gathered during interrogation of prisoners, according to which the enemy was preparing to attack within ten days.

It should now take a look at the Italian forces located in the eastern theater to identify those really committed in the first phase of the offensive of the *Western Desert Force*. The

10th Army was located in the area of Bardia-Bir-Sidi Omar Habata (south-west of Bir Sofafi) -el Maktila (east of Sidi el-Barrani). The Libyan divisions group with the 1st Libyan (Gen. Giovanni Ceno) at the *wadi* el-Maktila; the 2nd Libyan (Gen Armando Pescatori) arranged in the three strong points of Alam el Tummar; the 4th CC.NN. Division 3 *gennaio* (Gen. Fabio Merzari) deployed to protect the logistics base of Sidi el-Barrani, where were had been constituted depots for ammunition, fuel, food and water, spread on a large area, in anticipation of the imminent progression to Marsa Matruh. The XXI Corps had the Maletti grouping at Nibeuia Alam and Alam El Iktufa, southwest of the 2nd Libyan; the *Cirene* (Gen. Alessandro De Guidi) placed on the rocky hill and hilly Bir Sofafi and articulated in the four cornerstones of Alam er-Rabia, crossroads of hill 236, crossroad of Qabr el-Mahdi and hill 226 Bir Sofafi; the *Catanzaro* (Gen. Giuseppe Amico) deployed in eight strongholds in the south-east of Bug Bug. The XXIII Corps garrisoned Bardia with the 1st CC.NN. division 23 *marzo* (Brig. Gen. Francesco Antonelli), occupied the passes of Sollum and of Halfaya with the 2nd division CC.NN. 28 *ottobre* (Brig. Gen. Francesco Argentino) and blocked the entrance from direction south with the division *Marmarica* (Gen. Ruggero Tracchia), deployed between Sidi Omar and the ridge of Sollum.

To the rear, reporting directly to the Comando Superiore, were the control of the XXII Corps (Gen. Enrico Pitassi Mannella) the *Sirte* division (Gen. Vincenzo Della Mura), the special armored brigade (Gen. Valentino Babini) and the artillery maneuver Command with the 10th and 20th Corps artillery grouping. In addition to these forces, so to speak, mobile, there were the garrisons of the forts of Tobruk and Bardia and the smaller Cyrenaica desert forts well as the troops of the Libyan Sahara ⁽³⁸⁾. Ultimately, the first clash interested only the Libyan divisions group and XXI Corp, namely the large units designed to move on Marsa Matruh. They amounted to 12 Infantry battalions, 20 Libyans battalions and black 6 shirts; 3 machine gun battalions, six companies of 81 mm. mortars and 10 anti-tank of 47/32; 1 Tank Battalion M 11 tanks and 3 light tanks battalions; 22 groups of field artillery and 12 of 65/17 accompanying batteries. In total, about 50,000 men.

In anticipation of the resumed offensive the command of the 5th Air Fleet had set up the most advanced fields. Some of between Tobruk and Sollum, which were gradually occupied, while those between Sollum and Sidi el-Barrani, on which were set up provisions and services, were to prevent the

prior recognition by the opponent and reserved for the transfer of air units at the time of the offensive. According to the Gen. Porrola situation was satisfactorily:

"(...) As the Ministry of 'Aeronautics done gradually to meet the demands especially designed to further enhance the possibilities of logistical means (truck units, repair teams, recovery teams, stores, warehouses, etc.), On the eve of the offensive, except the need for an increase of laborers to repair equipment for the recovery and for workshops and vehicles except the lack of transportation from Naples about 150 vehicles lying on the docks, the organization could be considered almost complete numerically in its means (material and staff) and in its rational order and functioning" ⁽³⁹⁾

In fact I was less reassuring state of affairs just in logistical appearance most delicate service and repairs aircraft engines (S.RAM). Units more properly combat the 5th Air Fleet, namely the 13th Division and the 9th and the 14th Air Brigade, had 238 to 336 efficient aircraft in the line ⁽⁴⁰⁾:

bombers (S. 79, S.81 and S.82): 96 of 131 efficient aircraft in the line;
 assault (CR.32, Ba.65 and Ro.41). 28 of 56 efficient aircraft in the line;
 fighters (CR.42): 110 of 145 in efficient aircraft in the line;
 torpedo (S.79): 4 out of 4 in efficient aircraft in the line;

The unserviceable aircraft therefore amounted to about 30%, of which more than half in the squadron repairable, which made them susceptible to rapid reconditioning. However, both for the weather conditions which made outdoor work difficult, and for the remarkable decentralization of the devices on the fields, the time actually needed for small and medium repairs was much higher than normal. On the following page shows the Order of the battle of the 5th Air Fleet.

Regarding the British availability must take a step back to explain, at least in part, the appreciation discrepancy made between by the Italian Commands and the real situation at the end of September, the S.I.M had estimated in Egypt about 160,000 British Maximum. And that in the entire Middle East there were troops excessive in relation to the local situation and intention of the strategic moment it might be inferred from the fact that "*the General Staff Imperial continues to lobby because of forces removed*"

5th AIR FLEET SITUATION AT THE BEGINNING OF DECEMBER 1940

AREA	COMMAND & UNIT	Aircraft			Location	Trained Crews	
		Type	Number	Eff.		Day	Night
Command 5th Fleet	5th Fleet Unit Aircraft	SM-79	1	1	Apollonia	1	1
		Ghibli	2	2	Apollonia	3	3
	175th Squadron R.S.T	SM-79	6	2	Tobruk N. S	4	2
	278th Torpedo Bomber Squadron	SM-79	4	4	El Adem	5	5
	Transport Group	SM-75	13	8	Benghazi (Berka)	8	8
		SM-74	2	1	Benghazi (Berka)		
	614th aid Squadron	Cant. Z. 506	4	2	Benghazi (hydroplane)	4	4
13th Division «Pegaso» T. 4	9th Stormo B. T 26th Gruppo	SM-79	13	9	Cistel Benito	9	4
	9th Stormo B. T 29th Gruppo	SM-79	10	7	Gambut	11	4
	14th Stormo B.T. 44th Gruppo	SM-79	14	8	Tmimi	7	4
	14th Stormo B.T 45th Gruppo	SM-79	10	6	Tmimi	8	6
	33rd Gruppo B.T	SM-79	11	7	Z. 1	5	1
	54th Gruppo B. T	SM-81	12	11	Benina	10	8
	Heavy Bombing unit	SM-82	5	5	Berka	6	6
		SM-79	2	2	Berka		
9th Brigade «Leone»	15th Stormo 46th Gruppo	SM-79	17	11	Castel Benito	7	4
	15th Stormo 47th Gruppo	SM-79	16	9	Castel Benito	9	5
	41st Stormo B. T. 59th Gruppo	SM-79	11	11	Castel Benito	8	1
	60th Gruppo	SM-79	10	10	Castel Benito	3	2
totals			163	116		108	68

from the Middle East" ⁽⁴¹⁾. Churchill, however, was of a different opinion. For more was very dissatisfied with the distribution of units in the theater of operations, not just for the unjustified, for him, location of units in Palestine and Kenya:

"This geographical distribution (or distributions) of our forces - he observed - it highlight the prevailing ideas, which are mistaken for another in a strategic sense. However, it was explained that although these forces were already destined to special theaters of operations, may all go in the Middle East if it were needed. So I agreed to insert words to that put him in the clear. Nevertheless, the paragraph providing for the dispersion of these divisions without taking into account the needs of the war made to me a bad impression.

Then we turn our attention to the growing waste of troops in Kenya and to the continuous waste made of it in Palestine (...) Finally - wrote to the minister of war on September 24 - is the impressive waste that is made of regular British troops in the Canal Zone, in Cairo and Alexandria for the police service, and the general relaxation of the control of the Middle East in focus firmly as possible to the battle and in reducing the inadequacy of rations to the actual strength of the unit. I have not had an answer to my request for figures on this point.

My idea, like yours, is to collect in the Middle East the strongest army possible within the next few months, and in other documents I have indicated the number of divisions that I hope you can concentrate. But I believe that the Ministry of War and the Egyptian command the first thing to do would be to use in the best way the large contingent of troops they already have, and it already costs us a lot" ⁽⁴²⁾.

And he invited the Minister of War, Eden, to personally inspect the theater of operations. Eden arrived in Cairo on October 15 and immediately wanted an interview with Wavell, Longmore and Wilson. The Italian offensive to Marsa Matruh was considered possible at most three divisions (ternary course, even then four or five divisions binary) because of the constraints imposed by the scarcity of water and the precariousness of communication lines. No concern about ' possible presence of an armored division between the three Italians suppositories, tanks were used to support the infantry and not collected in large units. Probably the deployment Graziani would be based on two pillars, along

coastal strip, the other much further south; as a result, while the first would be contained by rearguard actions conducted by the 4th Indian Division, the latter would be invested on the southern flank by the entire 7th Armored Division, equipped with 150 new tanks, for which they had been made in the desert numerous deposits of gasoline and water, duly spaced. Marsa Matruh, then, was solidly organized in defense and his garrison amounted to five infantry battalions and one machine gun with eight or nine batteries ⁽⁴³⁾. Also available were the 6th Australian division of two brigades, the British 16th Brigade, one New Zealand brigade and one Polish.

Situation, in essence, soothing provided air support had been adequate. According Wavell was safety margin *"is the material, especially artillery and anti-tank weapons, it takes more than men. The enemy will not reach the Delta albeit with great mass of infantry, but only if it may be higher in armored forces"* ⁽⁴⁴⁾. According Longmore an air strike conducted by Italian decision and supported by German units would immediately overwhelmed its fighter squadrons of first line. *"And if Italians do not attack?"* Eden asked. In extreme secrecy to the point that Churchill was informed by Eden only to the return of these in London on November 8 - the details of operation *Compass*, scheduled for the end of November.

Wavell's forces were with the benefit of a big increase. Actually, however, not all that came was immediately usable, since the transport of an entire division for the route Cape lasted a couple of months or more and the current guideline not to use large units if not complete. Consequently there was a considerable disparity between the overall size of men in Egypt and large units employed or employable. On this Churchill insists that Eden verified meticulously the situations of fighting force and the force's provision, appearing excessive to the gap between them and not understanding that only part of the troops in place was used in battle. And this state of affairs had a significant effect also on the reconstruction of the enemy forces from the SIM.

Since the end of August to the end of 1940 came to Egypt by sea 126,000 men, namely 76,000 from Britain and 50,000 from India, Australia and New Zealand. In terms of large units and units, this meant the influx summarized on the next page.

from the United Kingdom	from India and beyond
2nd armored division with: 1st Arm. brigade 3rd Arm. brigade 2nd support group minor units 2nd tank regiment 7th tank regiment 3rd Hussar regiment three Field Art. Rgts three Hvy. Field Art. Rgts. a specialist artillery Rgt. a costal Art. Bn 19 anti-aircraft Bns two companies pioneers Radio unit various complements	two brigades of the 7th Australian Inf. Div. one brigade of the 6th Australian Inf. Div. one brigade of the New Zealand Inf. Div. a Indian cavalry Rgt. four Indian battalions

To these must be added the 5th Indian division and two regiments of artillery landed in Port Sudan ⁽⁴⁵⁾; the 1st South African division and the 1st South African anti-aircraft brigade arrived in Mombasa. Definitely. the British presence in Egypt later this year could be estimated to be around 200,000 men, including in the calculation the 5th Indian Division - which was permissible believe came from Sudan -and units moved from Palestine; figure undoubtedly lower than that accepted by the SIM (250,000 men and 300,000 men in late October at the end of year). But the most glaring error of assessment concerned the reconstruction of the order of battle English: fifteen divisions, roughly twice the reality ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Since September 11, that is, by the advance of Berti to Sidi el-Barrani, Wavell had considered an offensive in Cyrenaica and embarked on a study on the complex logistical problem that it would entail. This being his idea, although still rather vague, for the moment he had ordered to O'Connor not to get tied down but of a limited to a counter-attack if the Italian offensive had arrived at Marsa Matruh. Therefore, the 11th Hussars, reinforced by an RAF. armored car company. and the support group of the 7th Armored Division maintained contact with Italian columns, while the bulk of the *Western Desert*

Force deployed in zone the entrenched camp. The arrangement assumed around Sidi el-Barrani by 10th Army did consider possible time-limited action against one or more Italian unity, overcoming the inevitable logistical problems.

"The enemy defensive deployment - Wavell later wrote seemed very defective and incomplete. It extended over a wide front with a series of fortified camps, which were not able to assist each other and separated by wide intervals His defense was lacking, Furthermore, depth" ⁽⁴⁷⁾

On 20 October, then he asked Wilson about proposed a rapid attack on at the same time Sidi el-Barrani and Sofafi: the wings of the Italian line. In particular thought to an action of the 4th Indian Division, possibly reinforced by a brigade, along the coast and by the 7th Armored Division, reinforced by some motorized battalions against the right side of Berti on the escarpment, near Sofafi. If all went well, the 7th Armored would exploit the success heading north, that is down from the slope and toward Bug Bug. Given the difficulties of supply it would probably not have been possible further action longer than 4 - 5 days much more was needed to cover initially, in the next two nights, the distance between the two positions and attack the next morning on the second night of transfer.

Troops available: the 7th Armored and 4th Indian organically complete, the new 7th Tank Regiment equipped with the recent *Matilda* ⁽⁴⁸⁾ and part of the garrison of Marsa Matruh. At the end of operation, the *Western Desert Force* had to gather at the railhead. I just allowed to learn about the project were the commanders of the *Western Desert Force* and the two divisions and Wilson the Chief of Staff. O'Connor reflected at length on the issue and felt that an attack would have resulted in a dispersion of contemporary efforts at damaging relations strength necessary for such an undertaking. He proposed then to penetrate in the large gap found to exist between Nibeua and Bir er Rabia and attack first the central positions, then the others in successive phases; Bug Bug, an important logistics center, could be raided; Sofafi would be the last goal, to defense installations disrupted. Wavell approved the design of maneuver was convinced of the possibility of a full success. He knew that

the Italian forces were more numerous, but they were essentially of infantry on foot and were no match for it in terms of Matilda tanks were virtually invulnerable), in artillery (had arrived the great new pieces to 25 pounds), in training The operation was to begin by surprise with the full moon of November, that is to say the last moon of the month.

The only doubt concerned the Air Force, whose expansion constituted by Wavell *conditio sine qua non**. The situation of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East in early October was qualitatively improved compared to that of June: a group of heavy bombers had been armed with *Wellington*, one of medium bombers with *Blenheim IV* and a *Hurricane* fighter but with Longmore took the 'the appointment of Air Mar. Portal to the Chief of Staff of the *Royal Air Force* to invite him to a strengthening of the local air units as soon as possible Moreover, even Eden pressed in this way. The success in the *Battle of Britain* and arrival of the winter led the Chiefs to agree that it was time to provide. The suitable solutions were two: accelerate the replacement of the less modern aircraft or increase the strength of the groups, thus reducing the loss of time associated with sending complete units. For the moment it was decided to activate in October, a steady stream of aircraft and crews. For medium bombers was established a monthly amount of 48 *Blenheim IV* for heavy 23 *Wellington*, for 24 *Hurricane* fighters. Also were assigned 149 *Glenn Martin* fighters and 227 *Mohawk* fighters, the first of which, however, they began to flow in appreciable numbers only at the beginning of 1941 and the second showed such restrictions from being routed to India and South Africa for the training of pilots. Longmore, however, insists on the establishment of two other fighter groups. The program was to be carried out mainly along the Takoradi-Sudan-Egypt, route which meant a slow start. Also for Greece caused the sending five groups need in the theater. Basically, for operation *Compass* were made available to Air Commodore Collishaw, commander of the No. 202 Wing, three fighter groups (two in *Hurricane* and one of *Gladiator*) and seven bombers (three of *Blenheim*, three in *Wellington* and one of *Bombay*) for a mass of 48 fighters and 116 bombers. In addition to the army aviation-dependent control of the *Western Desert Force* had two mixed groups and a squadron of fighter and reconnaissance

*Latin: an essential condition or requirement [literally: without which not]

While awaiting the development of an operational tool, Wavell and Wilson went several times in the Western Desert discussing the project, checking the premises and developments presumable and calculating reinforcements. In this context, on 25 and 26 November did carry out an exercise near Marsa Matruh. The units - 4th Indian Division and 7th Tank Regiment - were presented as training attack of enemy camps, with a warning that a second exercise was scheduled for early December. Only a few people knew that instead it was a test - with fields of Nibeua and Alam El Tummar reproduced as closely as possible on the ground - offensive, the date of which came in the meantime postponed for ten days. Much attention was brought to the mechanized tactics to be used against the fortified camps. If the units had gained considerable combat experience in the desert, those infantry were confronted with an unknown and even the *Matilda* was new in many ways. It was defined the roles of planes and artillery for the close support; It was designed and tested a technique for overcoming minefields and anti-tank ditches; were established modalities for the joint action of tanks and infantry (this in the wake of those, after the opening of any openings) and studied a careful coordination between fire and movement in the infantry units environment, marking the rhythm the entry into action in due course of the basics of battalion and company fire; It was also overshadowed the event, in front of a large proportion of success, to continue the offensive until the Egyptian border; ultimately, it was left the only imponderable hazards of combat.

"I do not have excessive hopes on the outcome of this operation - Wavell wrote to Wilson on November 28 - but I want to be sure that where there is a good chance we are prepared morally, psychologically and logistically to exploit to the full ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

According to the assessment of the *Intelligence Service* the Italians possessed beyond the border six or seven divisions (two metropolitans, two black shirts and two or three of Libya) and a armored group totaling 80,000 men, 250 guns and 120 tanks. The reconstruction was widely acceptable, however, it requires some clarification. The strength of Berti displaced beyond Sollum did not exceed 50,000 men, with 300 pieces of field artillery and heavy

field. As for the tanks, the only real wagons were 22 M 11 of 11 tons⁽⁵⁰⁾ efficient of Maletti's, who had to contend with the *Matilda* from 26 tones⁽⁵¹⁾ and the *cruiser* MK I, MK II, and MK III from 13- 15 tons. Wavell, in fact, intended to commit 35,000 men with 120 guns, 60 armored cars and 275 tanks, divided into about 145 light tanks of 5 tons, 80 cruisers, and 50 Matilda infantry tanks⁽⁵²⁾.

The plan of O'Connor's provided for three stages. In the first, the 4th Indian and the 7th *Tanks* had to enter the Italian defense system between the escarpment and Nibeuia, namely between the *Cirene* and the Maletti group, then point to the north and attack the rear positions of Nibeuia e of Alam el Tummar (2nd Libyan division). The 7th Armored Division would ensure protection against any Italian counterattacks from Bug Bug or Sofafi and the Selby brigade, out of Marsa Matruh, had the task of engaging the front positions el-Maktila (1st Libyan division) while from the sea ships of the *Mediterranean Fleet* would bombard El Maktila and Sidi el-Barrani. The second phase, expected in the event of a positive outcome of the attack on Nibeuia and Tummar el-Alam, was concerned, the investment of Sidi el-Barrani by the 4th Indian, always with the reinforced by the 7th *Tanks*, while the 7th Armored Division had to cease all communication and rage in the area between the open stretch between Bug Bug-Bir el Azzaziya and the escarpment. The third stage involved the possible exploitation of the success by the 7th Armored and towards Sollum, with the assistance of the naval bombardment, and towards Sollum. For its part, the *Royal Air Farce* involved a systematic bombardment of Libyan airports from Malta and Egypt on the eve of the offensive and a aerial patrol to protect the march towards and starting points for the attack.

The logistical problem of the entire operation had two main aspects: the overcoming of the long distance between the base of Marsa Matruh and the Italian device and feeding the effort for five days. One was addressed by performing the movement in two night stages and resigning to stand a whole day in the desert. The other was also linked to transport capacity, which had already affected the size of the force of the operation, binding it to the possibility of complete motorization. It was therefore decided prior preparation of two advanced depots: n. 3, near the roadway from Marsa Matruh - Sidi el-Barrani, a little more than thirty kilometers from Marsa Matruh, and

the N. 4, the height the above the roadway but close to the Sollum escarpment. They must be equipped with five days of food, ammunition and fuel and water for two. The gathering began on November 11 and turned completed on December 4; after which the three transport companies used for the purpose were assigned to the 4th Indian division. The water supply, with tankers, ended December 7, the day he was to start the movement of troops. With everything Wavell was yes, convinced that the big foray planned would give a favorable result, but locally, without flashy developments. It was so cautious that in a December 6 telegraph to Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General:

"1. If time allows, the preliminary motion will take place the night 7/8 December march towards night 8/9 December morning attack on December 9.

2. I feel no reasonable expectations should be formulated in this operation that was planned only as a raid east. We are far inferior on the ground and in the air, we have to overcome more than 75 miles of desert and attack an enemy that is fortified for three months. Please do not encourage optimism.

3. Creagh is in the hospital and may be unavailable, what it would be regrettable because everything depends on the use of the armored division ⁽⁵³⁾.

Needless to say, the moderation of Wavell was intended to curb Churchill who said: "*Of course, they are astounded by paragraph 2 ...*" -but the commander in chief of the Middle East had other ideas for the head. He thought of having to assign prominence to the reduction of the Italian influence in East Africa. So he decided, without notifying O'Connor, sending the 4th Indian to Sudan at the end of five days granted to the operation. It would be replaced by a brigade of the 6th Australian Division right away and the rest of the division at the end of December.

On December 5, Wilson sent the first and last written directive to O'Connor, on the 6th these circulated the operation order for *Compass*. On the same day the 4th Indian is moved to the area of Gerawla, halfway between Maaten Baggush and Marsa Matruh, Bir Kenayis, about fifty kilometers southwest of Marsa Matruh, on track to Siwa. On December 7, the troops were informed that it was not a second exercise but an authentic act of war, the beginning of which was established by the early hours of the 9th.

The same evening Graziani was made aware by the Information Office

of the Comando Superiore who from an English soldier, captured on the front of the 2nd Libyan two nights before, had asserted not to harbor "*any doubt on the next British offensive that would begin within ten day*".

2. The BATTLE OF SIDI EL BARRANI (9-11 DECEMBER)

On Saturday 7 Decembers the *Royal Air Force* began the aerial offensive against the forward airports and those of Castel Benito and Benina. In the afternoon the forces of O' Connor left the area of Bir Kenayis - where the 4th Indian just had arrived and the 7th Armored was stopped for some weeks - and they were about to begin the long approach march. Approximately ten thousand vehicles proceeded in the desert, towards the West, at a speed of a dozen kilometers per hour, in long two columns: the 4th Indian to the north and the 7th Armored to the south. The point of lance, the 7th tank regiment, had moved with an anticipation of a pair of days and now, reached the screening protection that for a long time was stationed some distance from the Italian positions, it was largely waiting. For all of Sunday the British troops remained exposed to the Italian aerial recon, but a single aircraft flew over the interested area and for the existence of a sure haze or for taken care of examination it did not characterize the impending danger. At dusk of the 8th all the forces engaged in operation *Compass* were concentrated at *Piccadilly Circus*, the rendezvous zone to a score of kilometers to south-east of Nibeuia. The 11th Hussar and the light units covered the front. Between 21:00 and 24:00 the monitor *Terror* and the gunboat *Aphis* heavy bombarded Maktila, while the gunboat *Ladybird* bombarded Sidi el-Barrani. At the same time aerial formations constantly over flew the field so as to suffocate the noise of the tanks in motion.

On the Italian side was substantial tranquility. The situation description, circulated by the Army Command on 7 December, delineated the four hypotheses of British action but basically it admitted only an eventual attack limited to some strong points, excluding that is to say an offensive in depth. Such a profile was at least born to the eyes of the commander of the Libyan divisions group ⁽⁵⁴⁾ from the decision by the army to embezzle from each of the Libyan divisions a group from 75/27 and withdrawal to the west of Bardia the tank grouping that had participated in the advance one on Sidi el

BRITISH FORCES EMPLOYED IN OPERATION <i>COMPASS</i>	
Command <i>Western Desert Force</i> (Lt. Gen. R.N. O'Connor)	
7th Armored Division (Maj. Gen. M. O'Moore Creagh), with:	
4th Armored brigade (Brig. J .S.L. Caunter):	
7th Hussar	
2nd <i>Royal Tanks</i>	
6th <i>Royal Tanks</i>	
7th Armored brigade (Brig. H.E. Russel):	
3rd Hussar	
8th Hussar	
1st <i>Royal Tanks</i>	
Support Group (Brig. W.H.E. Gott):	
I bn. <i>King's Royal Rifle Corps</i>	
II bn <i>Rifle Brigade</i>	
1st & 4th Horse Artillery	
divisional units:	
11th Hussar	
3rd & 106th Horse artillery	
2nd Engineer company	
141st Engineers field park	
Two companies armored cars from the R.A.F.	
4th Indian Division (Maj. Gen. N.M. for P. Beresford-Peirse), with:	
5th Indian Infantry brigade (Brig. W.L. Lloyd):	
I bn. <i>Royal Fusiliers</i>	
III/1st <i>Punjab Regiment</i>	
IV/6th <i>Rajputana Rifles</i>	
one Anti-tank company	
11th Indian Infantry brigade (Brig. R.A. Savory):	
II bn. <i>Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders</i>	
I/6th <i>Rajputana Rifles</i>	
IV/7th <i>Rajput Regiment</i>	
one Anti-tank company	
16th English Infantry brigade (Brig. C.E.N. Lomax):	
I bn. <i>Queen's Regiment</i>	
II Bn. <i>Leicestershire Regiment</i>	
I bn. <i>Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders</i>	
Divisional Units:	
<i>Central India Horse</i>	
I Bn. <i>Northumberland Fusiliers</i> (Machinegun)	
1st, 25th & 31st Field Artillery	
3rd Horse Artillery	
4th, 12th, 18th & 21st Engineer companies	
11th Engineers field park.	

Selby Group (Brig. A.R. Selby):
III Bn. <i>Coldstream Guards</i> one company <i>Northumberland Fusiliers</i> one company 1st <i>South Staffordshire Regiment</i> one company 1st <i>Cheshire Regiment</i> detachment 1st <i>Durham Light Infantry</i> a unit from the 7th Hussar unit from the 107th Horse artillery & from the 8th Field
6th Australian division (Maj. Gen. I. Mackay), with:
16th Australian Infantry brigade (brig. A.S. Allen): 2/1st Infantry 2/2nd Infantry 2/3rd Infantry
17th Australian Infantry brigade (brig. S.G. Savige): 2/5th Infantry 2/6th Infantry 2/7th Infantry
19th Australian Infantry brigade (brig. H.C.H. Robertson): 2/4th Infantry 2/8th Infantry 2/11th Infantry
Divisional units: 6th Cavalry regiment 1st, 2nd & 3rd Field artilleries three engineer companies.
Army Corp units:
7th Indian Infantry brigade (less two battalions) I Bn. <i>Royal Sussex</i> IV/11th <i>Sikh Regiment</i> 7th <i>Royal Tanks</i> 104th Horse artillery 7th Heavy Field artillery 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft artillery six Light Anti-Aircraft batteries

THE ITALIAN FORCES ENGAGED FOR OPERATION <i>COMPASS</i>	
10th Army Command (Gen. I. Gariboldi)	
Libyan divisions group Command (Gen. S. Gallina) with:	
1st Libyan division (gen. G. Cerio): 1st Libyan infantry Regiment 2nd Libyan infantry Regiment two companies of 47/32 guns which one from the g.a.f. 1st Libyan artillery Regiment with 77/28 guns a 75/27 battery from the <i>28 ottobre</i> two 65/17 batteries of which one of g.a.f. one 105/28 battery II mixed-engineer battalion	
2nd Libyan division (Gen. A Pescatori): 3rd Libyan infantry Regiment 4th Libyan infantry Regiment two companies of 47/32 guns IX light tank battalion 2nd Libyan artillery Regiment with 77/28 guns a 105/28 battery a 75/27 group from the <i>28 ottobre</i> two 65/17 batteries from of which one of the g.a.f. I mixed-engineer battalion.	
4th Militia division <i>3 gennaio</i> (Gen. F. Merzari): 250th cc.nn. legion 270th cc.nn. legion CCIV machine-gun battalion one company 47/32 guns 204th artillery regiment a 105/28 battery a group from 75 CK A/A. CCIV mixed-engineer battalion	
XXI army corps Command (Gen. C. Spatocco) with:	
63rd <i>Cirene</i> infantry division (Gen. A De Guides): 157th infantry regiment 158th infantry regiment LXIII machine-gun battalion 63rd 47/32 guns company 202nd 47/32 guns company from the <i>28 ottobre</i> 63rd motorcyclists company 45th artillery regiment I/21st artillery with 105/28 III/21st artillery with 75/27	

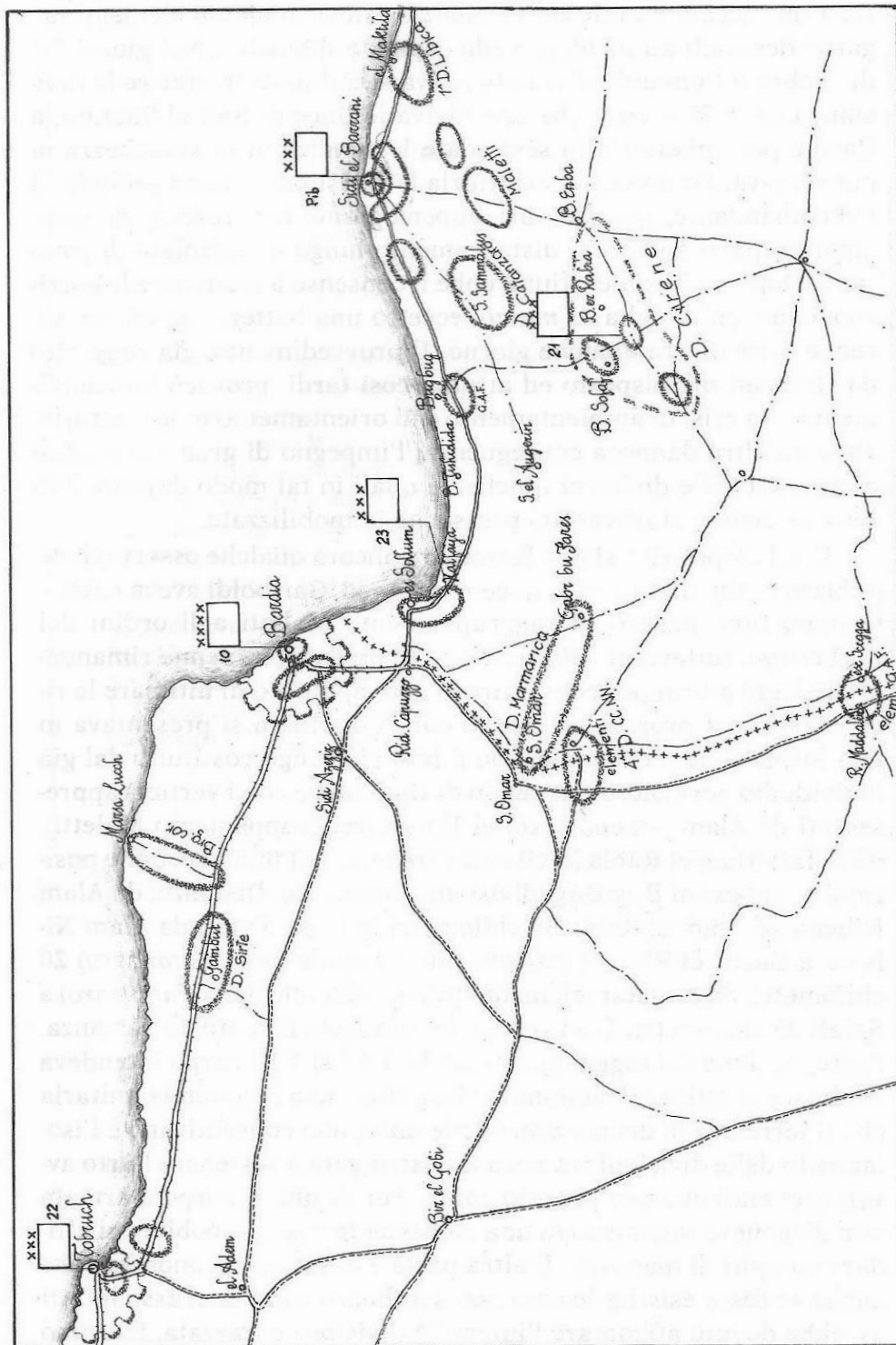
III/12th artillery with 100/17 two 65/17 batteries from the <i>Sirte Inf. Division</i> <i>LXIII Engineer Battalion</i>
64th <i>Calanzaro</i> Infantry Division (Gen. G. Amico): 141st infantry regiment 142nd infantry regiment LIV machine-gun battalion 64th 47/32 guns company 203rd artillery regiment LXIV engineer battalion
Libyan Battle-group <i>Maletti</i> (gen. P. Maletti): I, V, XVII and XIX Libyan battalions Saharan battalion II M tank battalion one 81mm mortars company a 65/17 artillery battalion a 75/27 artillery battalion one 105/28 battery two 47/32 companies
Units of the army corps: XVIII light tank battalion XX light tank battalion X machine-gunners squadron <i>Vittorio Emanuele II</i> one motorcyclists company

Barrani. Beside such conviction some negatives elements existed destined to affect the defensive ability. On the days of 2-4 December the Commander of the army had decided to transfer the *23 marzo* CC.NN. division, that was garrisoning the lines of Sidi el-Barrani, to Bardia to clear up in sixth days the fatigue conditions with which it had accumulated. He was to send as replacement the *3 gennaio* CC.NN. division, whose commander, Gen. Merzari, represented as soon as of having some units rejoin that were still in detachment along the frontier wire. After an initial refusal, he had the consent to withhold the corresponding units of the *23 marzo*, except a 65mm battery that would have arrived almost the same day. The provision, already suggested by Graziani but arraigned and put into effect therefore late, provoked unavoidably an acclimatization crisis and of orientation and, above all, it had an other harmful consequence: the engagement of great part of the motor vehicles of the Libyan divisions, which in such a way that during the English offensive they were found immobilized.

And on the dispositions formulated some observation can be made (sketch n. 10). At the end of November Gen. Gariboldi had thought opportune to pass the *Maletti* group to the command of the XXI Corps, however the transfer of dependency was sent some days latter in order to allow Gen. Spatocco to complete the recognitions of his own area. The army corps presented in a triangle formation, with the longer flank constituted-from the already characterized dangerous passage of Bir Enba and with the represented apexes from Alam Nibeua-Alam el Iktufa (*Maletti* group), from Sofafi-Alam el Rabia (63rd *Cirene* division) and, very behind, from the positions to south-east of Bug Bug (64th *Catanzaro* division). The Distances: from Alam Nibeua to Alam el-Rabia 30 kilometers in air line; from Alam Nibeua to Suani el-Khur (more eastern elements of the *Catanzaro*) 20 kilometers; from el-Qatar (more western element of the *Catanzaro*) to Sofafi 25 kilometers. Between the apexes of the triangle the void. In short, the allocation of the Maletti grouping to the XXI Corps meant to confer to the area called "Bug Bug" a unitary appearance that the land and the location of the units did not allow and the isolation of the divisions soon will force to them to support the enemy attack each in order for a proper account. Moreover, the army corps did not have a mobile reserve consisted which to entrust maneuver tasks. For another part it is right to recognize that even if had existed things would have changed: it in fact would have had to face the entire 7th Armored Division. The last reference regards the current control of the wide curtain of Bir Enba

Schizzo n. 10

SITUAZIONE ITALIANA AL 5 DICEMBRE



Who was most interested in the issue was Maletti, which he well understood that if the English offensive had started from that direction clearly the first objective would have been Alam el-Nibeuia - that is just it - in order to increase still more leaks. He wrote until December to the Commander of the Libyan divisions group, the letter closing with one meaningful phrase: *"In conclusion, my situation is an aisle in the wind"*. The letter was forwarded to the Commander of the Army, but the thing were seen differently there. In one of his visits to the group commander of the army had to diminish the danger since, after all, the passage could constitute a trap for an enemy who you had channeled himself and therefore he did not quite convene to close it or to limit it with the occupation of a intermediate strongpoint provision that among other things would have increased the dispersion of forces^{(56)*}. It must admit that with the troops and means of the time the speech - also valid in theory - did not appear very convincing. In any case it is difficult - above all knowing the apprehensions manifested by Graziani about the subject - to comprehend the lack of putting in to action a screen of mobile troops in correspondence with the passage. The surveillance exercised from the patrols detached from individual major unit that could only be short ranged. With motorized elements on location at least the alarm would have been much timelier.

The evening of the 8th Gen. Maletti signaled to Gen. Pescatori, commander of the 2nd Libyan, with which the contact was easy thanks to the proximity of the respective positions, noise of motor vehicles in direction of Bir Enba and aerial bombing on Alam Nibeuia. At 01:30 of the 9th Pescatori sent a radio message to the Commander of the Libyan divisions group:

"an unusually extended enemy aerial activity in the sky of Alam Nibeuia-Ras el Dai-Alam el Tummar seems stretches to disguise mechanizes equipment movement to you and induces to formulate hypothesis that enemy plans a field action on Alam Nibeuia-Ras el Dai".

Also a little later Graziani had the feeling of the imminence of something large. At 03:00 he recommended to the 10th Army Commander maximum vigilance and ordered to the Commander of the 5th Air Fleet to prepare, for the first lights of the dawn, the participation of the bulk of the air force along the Bir Enba-Ganawayat direction, coming to prescribe to transmit the relative dispositions in the clear in order to earn time.

*foot note #55 does not appear in the original text

But the entity of the danger had evidently not been estimated in its fullness. Until dawn the enemy patrols south acted aggressively on the eastern front of the group, then, towards the 06:00 of the morning, took a pause. At 07:00 the 4th Indian Division moved to the attack its first objective: Alam el-Nibeuia, naturally. Maletti was absolutely dissatisfied with things. As soon as reached Nibeuia had observed that the locality, also corresponding to a node of tracks, it did not lend to a valid static defense in how the undulations of the land introduced many limits to observation and shooting. However, about the front for clarification that the defensive stationing was transitory, he was limited in asking for reinforcements, also in order to arrange a mobile reserve. He dispatched two Libyan battalions and units of artillery, but with the tie to occupy also the position of Alam el Iktufa. Therefore two strong-points were constituted. The first one, at Alam el-Nibeuia, with a perimeter of 4,500 meters, was garrisoned with the I, V and XIX Libyan battalion, the Saharan battalion, one 81 mm. mortar company, one 47/32 mm. antitank gun company, two 20 millimeter antiaircraft batteries, one 65/17 group with two batteries, a 75/27 group, one 105/28 battery. The second, with a perimeter of approximately 2,500 meters, was held by the XVII Libyan battalion reinforced with one company from the XIX and four *Solothurn* rifles, one 47/32 mm. company, one 65/17 battery and one 20 mm. section. Externally, to the north-west of Alam el-Nibeuia, the II Medium Tank Battalion found itself, reduced to 22 M-11 Tanks.

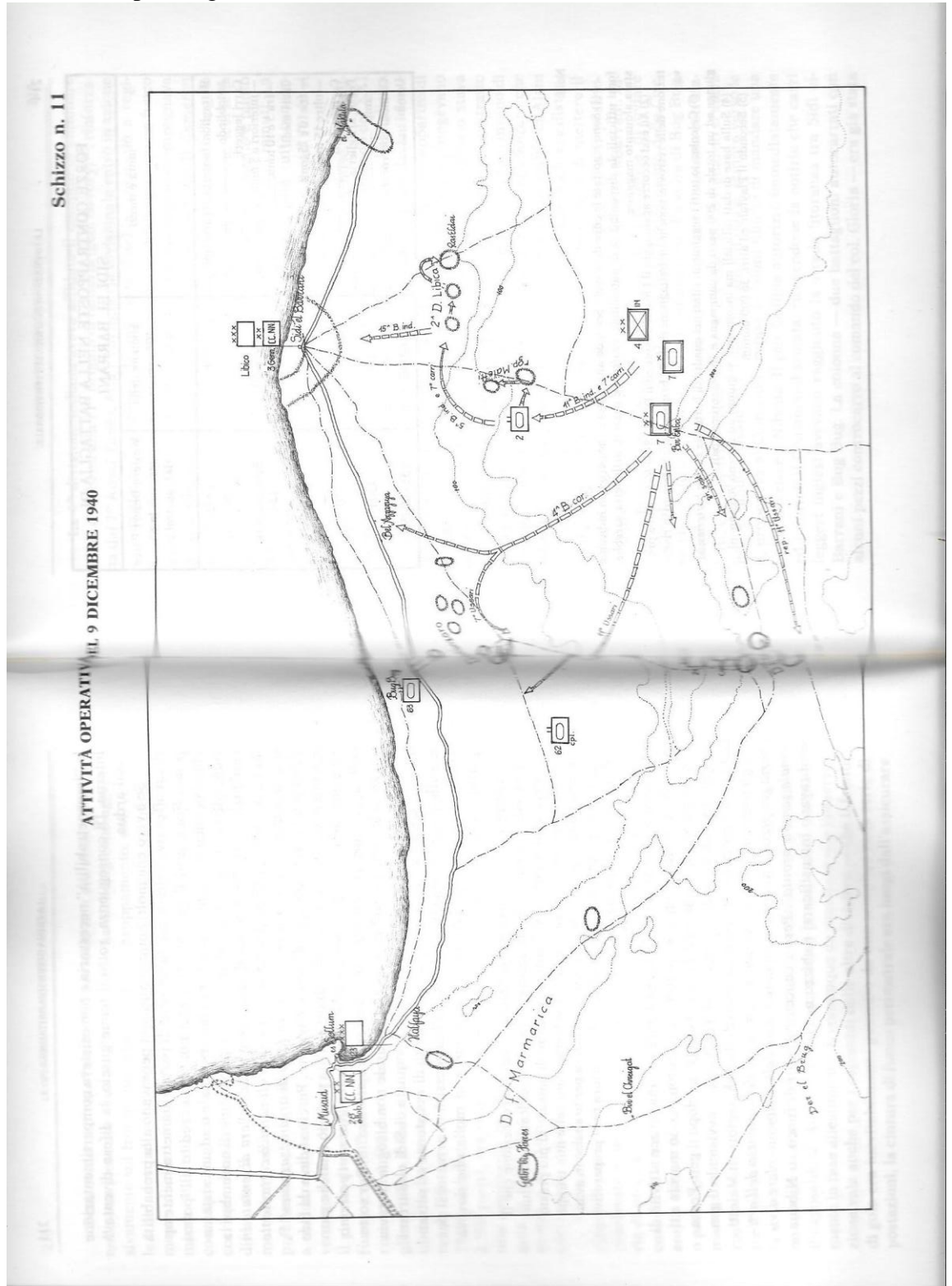
The defensive works made were reduced to nothing: a group of machine-gun and artillery, most elevated and walled off, rather than protected by a dry stone wall; a series of small emplacements in the trenches; a minefield limited, for lack of mine, just to the east and south and very minor. It was also in course of building of an anti-tank ditch, or better to say anti-armor, however, the work proceeded extremely slowly for deficiency of gear and the presence of small rock layers below the surface layer of soft soil. Also the personnel were often involved in armed reconnaissance and escort convoys of periodic replenishment that had to go up to Bug Bug and sometimes even a Bardia. In conclusion, the cornerstone of Alam el-Nibeuia was well under way, the other just under construction. It is still to be specified -and observation also applies to the tenets of the other divisions - that the gorge was inevitably studded from a simple roadside emplacements, the belt of fire perimeter was far from ensuring

the necessary "impenetrability" and non-existing inner compartmentation. Consequently, break the tenuous shell, the defense became very arduous.

If it is true that many commanders were not thinking of the probability of a British offensive, such seemed diametrically contradictory. Among these Gen. Maletti. He did not give credit to the hypothesis that the enemy prepared a stasis interval or a defensive system in the region of the Delta. Towards the end of November the conviction of the imminence of a large attack *"had become fixed in his thoughts. He had at various times said: 'the enemy surely will attack us and we are not ready in fact of organization'"* ⁽⁵⁷⁾, we reported to very late to the chief of general staff. Therefore was given himself to create in order to obtain better possibilities for defense. But just a few day before the offensive commented bitterly: *"We will not be able, in the current conditions, to resist more than seven or eight hours "* ⁽⁵⁸⁾. Also the underlining deficiencies of a structural character does not have however to forget that the long pause after the conquest of Sidi el-Barrani had not been characterized from a will of resistance to the bitter end on the reaching positions, but from the necessity to slow them for the time thought being necessary to compress the motivating force that had to release towards east.

"On the whole - Gen. Gallina wrote- given the conception that the Army Command had formed and it had communicated to us on the situation, and held account of our intentions to pass to very soon to the offensive towards Marsa Matruh, the alignment of my troops corresponded to the concept of waiting in position for the start forward and at the same time of safety and cover for the preparation of the foreseen offensive ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Towards 06:30 Maletti communicated the beginning of a lively action of opposing patrols, an intense noise of motor vehicles on the move and firing of medium-caliber artillery on Nibeua. Soon after Gen. Pescatori telephoned from Alam el Tummar to Sidi el-Barrani, informing Gen. Gallina of having contact with the chief of general staff for Maletti, that had assured him *"not to have need of the whole of the artillery already agreed, nor of the quick divisional column held ready"*. But the concentration of fire on Nibeua seemed to intensify (sketch n. 11).



OPPOSING FORCES IN THE BATTLE OF SIDI EL BARRANI

Units & Equipment	part of the 10th Army	Western Desert Force (excluding the 6th Austrian Inf. Div.) (1)
Infantry Battalions of various types.....	38	14 (2)
Armored Cars	-	60
Light Tanks:.....		
- less than a 5 tons.	circa 60	Bren carriers
- between 5 & 10 tons	-	145
Medium Tanks		
- Between 10 & 15 tons.....	22	80
- Over 15 tons	-	-
Heavy Tanks.....	-	50
Artillery Guns of Field & Hvy. Field	300	120 (3)
Anti-Tank Guns	82	? (4)
Men	60.000	31.000 (5)

Notes:

- (1) Are listed the figures from Wavell. According to other authors, but they do not indicate official sources, the armored car availability, *cruisers* and artillery pieces would have been somewhat greater.
- (2) To them it is necessary to add to *I Royal Sussex* and the *IV/11th Sikh Regiment* to protect the rear, as well as a battalion of the 7th Indian brigade held in reserve.
- (3) Calculating all the regiments cited in the battle with two *batteries*, one reaches to a total of 200 pieces of field and 16 heavy field.
- (4) On the basis of official data but incomplete, reaches at least 90 guns.
- (5) According to the Playfair and others, 36.000 men

The 4th Indian division had entrusted the task to eliminate Alaro el-Nibeua to the 11th infantry brigade (Gen. Savory) ⁽⁶⁰⁾, reinforced by the 7th *Royal Tanks*. The 7th divisional artillery entered in action and, in spite of the existence of a sure haze, it began to record the objectives. At 07:15 seventy-two guns opened a concentrated and violent fire. While the IV/7th *Rajput Regiment* engaged the strong point from the south and east, the 7th *Tanks*, followed by the II *Cameron Highlanders* and the I/6th *Rajputana Rifles* movements towards the north-west corner of the field. When it was a short distance, it saw the twenty wagons M11 not yet ready for combat and aimed directly on them.. It was an issue of ten minutes. The lack of orders, the surprise and nearly the immobility, all allowed to the express annihilation of the unit ⁽⁶¹⁾. Then the 7th *Royal Tanks* was turned to the front entrance of Alam el-Nibeua.

Towards 07:30 the Command of the 2nd Libyan rebroadcasted to Sidi el Barrani a phonogram of Maletti addressed to the Commander of the XXI Corps: the participation of the air force and was urgent all the artillery available against the massive attack lead from important British mechanized forces. The situation began to appear of gravely worrisome. The news reaching the Italian Commander was insufficient and fragmentary; however it was clearly that the enemy was taking maximum advantage of the wide open door in the section of Bir Enba. The Command of the XXI Corps, that had tried in vain to connect with Maletti, towards 08:00 was informed from the 64th *Catanzaro* that armored patrols had appeared in front of the strong point of Alam er-Rimth and from the 63rd *Cirene* that armored car were arriving a short distance from Alam er-Rabia. Gen Spatocco determined then to put the LVIII battalion of light tanks located to Bug Bug at the disposition of the 64th *Catanzaro* to interdict transit towards Sidi el-Barrani. Entrusted moreover Gen. Amico, commander of the division, to send elements south towards an encounter with the supply column of the 63rd *Cirene* that, as was customary, at dawn had departed for the trip to Bug Bug, as well as to try in some way to re-establish the contact with Maletti, that he appeared to have abandoned same. But with regard to him was being actively concerned Gen. Pescatori which, always near 08:00, proposed to the Libyan divisions group Command to send a quick column to Nibeua. Gen. Gallina authorized immediately and informed the Army Command, receiving the news that English light tanks had reached the costal road between Sidi el Barrani and Bug Bug. The column - two trucked battalions with some antitank pieces under the command of Col. Gloria - had already been

prepared and able to leave immediately. He reached the position of Alam el-Iktufa undisturbed and here he was stopped: stragglers coming from Alam el-Nibeua reported that the strong-point had been overrun by the enemy.

Towards 07:45 the *Matilda* of 26 tons was emerged unexpected from the haze and a cloud of sand in front of the defenders of Nibeua. All of whom could fire directly against the heavy tanks, that between a hail of projectiles and shells they advanced firing at point blank range and crushing, invulnerable. The servers of the 47/32 guns, not protected because the weapon was lacking in a shield, fell hardly in great number beside their pieces, succeeding in causing some damage to the crawler tracks of five *Matildas* and in a single case to perforating the lateral armor ⁽⁶²⁾. The 65/17 and the 75 turned out practically ineffective; the 105 battery, engaged in desperate counter-battery, very soon was reduced to silence. "*The enemy artillery continued to fire until they were exterminated*" ⁽⁶³⁾, the small Saharan battalion fell almost entirely, but to the end part of the Libyan infantry, confused and discouraged seeing that the tanks, as large as some of them had ever seen, were not stopped either from the fire at a close distance and knowing that Maletti had bravely fallen ⁽⁶⁴⁾ lost courage. In the meantime the two motorized battalions of 11th Indian brigade, dismounted 700-800 meters from the strong point, were entered the walled perimeter with the *Cameron*s in the led. At 08:30 organized resistance could be considered practically ended ⁽⁶⁵⁾. There remained, obstinate, of isolates centers of fire, eliminated in the course of mopping-up by the tanks and a battery from the 31st field artillery that fired at point blank. Towards 11:00 combat was finished. The Italian losses amounted to approximately 800 dead, of which 19 were officers, and the 1300 wounded, of which 38 were officers. The prisoners recorded by the English amounted to approximately 2000, including the wounded ⁽⁶⁶⁾. The Attacker lost 8 officers and 48 men.

The news sent from Pescatori to Sidi el-Barrani was more than eloquent on the dimensions of the offensive: according to some prisoners, the 4th Indian operated with three brigades, each with five battalions of 800 men; the artillery alignment comprised more than 120 guns, a good part which of medium-caliber, and altogether the medium tanks and armored cars exceeds 600. As things stand - the information was substantially taken for good - Pescatori proposed to clear the garrison from Alam el-Iktufa with Alam el-Tummar, under the protection of the Gloria column,

still before they pronounced a new attack. Gallina requested the authorization from the Commander of the army, but the answer obtained did not assume the responsibility of the retreat. At 11:00 he was in underway, after the abandonment of all materials given the lack of motor vehicles, while huge enemy armored forces already gathered six kilometers the west of Iktufa. There was a fear that the units in withdraw would become swept up during the distance. Instead, for as far as 11:30 the first shots of artillery fell on Alam el Tummar and aircraft flew over the area bombing and strafing, towards 13:00 the Gloria column reached its destination strangely undisturbed.

It was now the turn of the 2nd Libyan. It had constituted three strong points. First at Alam el Tummar the western (5,000 meters of perimeter): VI, VII and XIV Libyan battalions, five 47/32 platoons, three 20 mm. sections, the I/2nd Libyan artillery of 77/28, two batteries of 75/27, one of 65/17 and one anti-aircrafts of 75 mm. CK. The second at el-Tummar the eastern (3,500 meters of perimeter): XV battalion Libyan with one 47/32 guns platoon, the IX light tank battalion, the II Libyan group of 77/28, one battery of 105/28, one of 75/27 and two sections of 20 mm. The third was at Ras El-Dai ⁽⁶⁷⁾. It was more eastern and little larger of the previous one: II and XVI Libyan battalion with three platoons of 47/32, one battery of 65/17, two of 75/28 and one of 105/28, and three sections of 20 mm. At 11:30 approximately the adjustment part from the British artillery began, afterwards replaced by the aircraft of the *Royal Air Force*. All of it was sufficient to upset the emplacements and to provoke fires and reserve ammunition explosions. Towards 13:30 Pescatori informed Sidi el-Barrani that *"aerial attack stopped & lengthy firing of the artillery, remarkable enemy armored forces, continuations of infantry, have attacked the south-west front & the north-west of strong point n. 1"* ⁽⁶⁸⁾.

The attack had been rejected but the urgent and the absolute need of the participation of our air force. It was the last communication that reached the Libyan Divisions Command. *"Then nothing" - he had to report to Gen. Gallina - only the far away rumble of intense the bombardment of Alam el-Tummar*".

To the Commander of the 10th Army the situation was presented with confusion, also and above all for the impossibility of a timely transmission of messages and orders. Little later the signaling of the investment of Tummar western, was given the authorization to withdraw from the strong point of Iktufa, but with the order that the same Iktufa and Nibeua to be retaken if possible and with the clarification that the Maletti grouping had been placed under the command of Gallina. The reply was that Maletti had been overrun; Pescatori

gave no news and in all probability in his turn he had been crushed; an action of retaking was revealed unattainable for lack of motor vehicles and inadequacy of troops, and, at the point in which things were, was by now in the process of maintaining and defending Sidi el-Barrani. For the same reasons Gallina declared impracticable also unenforceable the order of Gariboldi, to send out a column from Sidi el-Barrani in order to attack from behind of the English armored units which had already appearing to the east of Bug Bug.

While the British Orazio had turned against the second Italian Curiazi*. When the mopping-up of Nibeua clearly proved begun to completion, the 5th Indian brigade (Gen. W L. Lloyd) and the 25th field artillery moved in order to invest Tummar West from the west and the rest of the artillery division take position to the east of Nibeua. Towards 11:00 the 7th *Tank* joined the brigade ⁽⁶⁹⁾. The visibility was always much reduced and more so for there was the beginning of a sandstorm in the south-north direction. The attack followed the lines of the previous one. At noon the English artillery began to register objects. At 13:00 the *Matilda* stormed without finding the strong point an obstacle and after twenty minutes the I *Royal Fusiliers* and the III/1st *Punjab Regiment* - carried by the 4th New Zealander transport company until 1500 meters from the limit of the field - were they entered into combat. The resistance was heated but marked. At 15:30 the commander of the strong point of Tummar East received a message from Pescatori: "*With XV battalion & maximum possible number of artilleries & IX tank battalion you are to reach strong point n. 1 in order to counterattack strong enemy units entering the strong point. Depart immediately*". It was evidently a move of desperation. Before that column could be put in motion the field of Tummar West was nearly completely overwhelmed. At 16:20 only the north-east corner of the strong point resisted and, while the mass of the English artillery began preparations on new the objective, a squadron of *Matilda* followed by the IV/6th *Rajputana Rifles* was about to go on Tummar East. It was then that the counterattack took place.

At Tummar East they were immediately given orders for participation, but it did not matter obviously of fast neither easy. Aware of the significance of the action, towards 16:20 only to have beginning the movement, just when the British batteries concentrated their fire on the strong point. On the right of the adducing caravan route to Tummar West advanced the XV Libyan battalion, followed by the artillery units (less one battery of 77/28

*Orazi e Curiazi (The Horatii and the Curiatii) is an opera by the Italian composer Saverio Mercadante.

which remained to support the movement of the tactical complex); on the left marched the IX tank battalion. Given the continuous enemy fire, nothing remain but to accelerate to the maximum pace, heedless of the losses. On the one hand the *Rajputana* came under the fire of the last pockets of resistance of Tummar West; from the other, the XV Libyan battalion, launch into a frantic race, towards the adversary, soon ran in to the concentrated fire of the machine-guns of the *Northumberland Fusiliers*, already consolidating the positions occupied.

The *Rajputana*, taken by the chest by the vehemence of the counterattack, went down from the motor vehicles and withdrew with the III/1st *Punjab*, but the fight in that flat desert land was unequal. For the very small light tank battalion (22 means) was about to face the *Matilda*: the 3.5 ton tank against that of 26 tons! The two formations were intercrossed "to comb", then the *Matilda* returned raging. The commander of the XV Libyan, Maj. Zaniboni, who guided the counterattack, saw the combat quickly to become fight of small groups. Towards 18:00 it was all ended. The losses endured from the Italian units numbered to 400 among died and wounded and approximately 700 prisoners ⁽⁷⁰⁾. Some light tanks succeeded to clear a passage and make amends for Sidi el-Barrani.

As for Beresford-Peirse decided to postpone to the incipient attack on Tummar East because of the darkness, the 7th *Tanks* already had already penetrated that camp also, remained almost devoid of defenders. Ras El-Dai remained, than in the late afternoon it succeeded to communicate to the Libyan Divisions Command of being encircled and not to hearing anything from the two camps of Alam el-Tummar.

The attack of the 4th Indian had been protect on the left by the 7th armored division: the support group was in charge of control from the north, east and south of the positions held by the 63rd *Cirene* around Sofafi; the 4th Armored Brigade, passing to the West of Nibeua, had proceeded on Bir el-Azzaziya and cutting the Sidi El Barrani-Bug Bug road; the 11th Hussars, placed for the occasion by the division, had headed towards the north-west running about in large void between the embankment of Sollum and the positions of the 64th *Catanzaro*; the 7th Armored Brigade, finally, was placed in reserve. At 17:00 Gen. O'Connor caught up with at Tummar West Gen. Beresford Peirse. He did not have news of the *Selby* group, but, seen the course of the combats of the day, thought of having sufficient elements that, he could on the next day: make to invest Sidi el-Barrani.

On the Italian side, instead, the things did not appear neither clear nor

reassuring. The latest, evidently, was Gen. Gallina, who since noon had expressed the intention to Gariboldi, but contrary to orders, to withdraw the 1st Libyan from the Maktila *Wadi* to Suani el-Dirin in order protect the wells existing at that place, the only water resource of the area, being in order to reinforce the garrison of Sidi el-Barrani. At 15:15 Gen. Giuliano, chief of general staff of the army, telephoned to the Comando Superiore:

"Gen. Gallina has communicated that Maletti retreated regularly on the 2nd Libyan protected by artillery. The 2nd Libyan withholds enemy pressure. The 1st Libyan continues to counter battery action on enemy artillery and a few armored car. Road workers withdrawing in part on Sidi el Barrani. Enemy aviation bombing Sidi El-Barrani. But contrary to orders this night I will make to withdraw the 1st Libyan to Suani el Dirin and the Gerbeira nucleus on Ras el Dai. Excellency Gariboldi not withstanding".

As we see, the situation was thoroughly outdated, but it had to be based on Graziani, who replied:

"I confirm the order for the first Libyan division to remain & resist in place. Maletti grouping collects behind the 2nd Libyan making its front the south-west & collecting itself with the 3 *gennaio* [CCNN] division. In such a way made a robust triangle between Barrani, Alam el Tummar & Maktila with adequate forces. Supply does not lack. Resisting valid maneuver in order to re-establish situation is allowing deployment containing enemy infiltration. While sending at once motor vehicles to the *Cirene* division for place them in a condition for realizing maneuver on the enemy flank" ⁽⁷¹⁾.

That the triangle mentioned could be "*robust*" is pure optimism. What, then, the 63rd *Cirene* could maneuver yes "*to re-establish*" the situation was simple poetry. It does not seem thinkable that it was in a position able to take the open field against a hundred of tanks (the news on the enemy - accepted without giving rise to doubts - not only gave the British a crushing supremacy, which was true, but quite exaggerated numerically) with hope of succeeding, when no previous justified the slightest confidence in such an undertaking. As was worth saying to the divisions that were in the cauldron to do their best and retrieve the units not yet involved. And in fact, after further mature examination of the state of the things, this was the conclusion. The Army had already committed many trucks in order to send reinforces to the 64th *Catanzaro*, managed with difficulty to scrape together one fifty for the 63rd *Cirene*, therefore learns

it needs. A simple look at the map was sufficient to understand that also for the XXI Corps the things were placed badly.

He had assumed responsibility for the Bug Bug sector the morning of 6 December placed them near hill 226 to the east of Sofafi. It already been said of the precarious connections with the 64th *Catanzaro* and the Maletti group. Seeing the characteristics of the dispositions, Gen. Spatocco ⁽⁷²⁾ tried at once to constitute an element tactical of maneuver, but the shortage and the tremendous wear and tear of the motor vehicles as well as the necessity to tap into the armament of the strong point in order to create a reserve did not allow to have excessive confidence on the power of such formation, therefore as the facts will demonstrate. Therefore it appeared preferable to hold at Sofafi the two light tank battalions (XX and LXIII) assigned but not still arrived. Moreover the events of 9 December induced Spatocco to stop at Bug Bug the aforementioned tank battalions placing them at the disposition of the 64th *Catanzaro*, which had to adsorb the new created strong point to protection the logistics center of Bug Bug, and to review the positions of the 63rd *Cirene*, who still appeared very arranged. For as much the two divisions were still in order it was clear that each of them had to face the storm alone, that each was nailed to the land and that the Commander of the Army Corps could not think of a coordinated action. Ultimately, at 18:00 Gen. Galliuna arrived allowed to arbitrate arrangements as he believed best. Naturally he resumed at once the decision to withdraw the 1st Libyan and do well since this was in order to stay cut off.

To the east, along the coast, the *Selbyforce* was ready. Gen. Selby had left from Marsa Matruh with not more than 1,800 men and 380 vehicles ⁽⁷³⁾ the maximum compatible with means of transport available - with the task to engage frontally the 1st Libyan but above all to prevent them to move to the aid to the 2nd Libyan. After having moved about sixty false tanks in a desert zone to the West of Marsa Matruh, before dawn of the 9th he occupied the line of departure. For the entire morning combat did not develop. Towards 15:30 Selby, also ignoring the outcome of the fight to Alam el Tummar, was resolved to send at dusk a detachment to the south-west of the Maktila *Wadi* in order to try to foreclose the coast. He did not succeed because of the difficulties of the nocturnal march in that land, but the patrols reached until to Bir Qasim, as that the officer sent by Gallina in order to bring to Gen. Cerium the order of withdraw from el-Maktila along the coastal track, they succeeded with difficulty to escape, continuing on foot along the coast and reaching the

1st Libyan at 21:00. In the course of the night the entire the division withdrew and at 08:00 the head of the column arrived at Suani el-Dirin.

The previous evening the two adversaries had made their respective decisions. One preparing themselves for the worse, the other in order to continue the *raid*, also without imagining the developments. Graziani, perceived the gravity of the events, himself arriving at Bardia, the Commander of the army. The examination of the situation confirmed the sad forecasts: the Libyan divisions group was in part destroyed and part blocked; the XXI Corps was not a Army Corps but two divisions, one of them which was (63rd *Cirene*) isolated and the other isolated (64th *Catanzaro*) without contact with Sidi el-Barrani; the army was found deprived of every possibility of maneuver, nor could the Comando Superiore furnish any aid.

Corps with the help of the 5th Air Fleet; organization to defend the ridge of Sollum, from Halfaya to Fort Capuzzo, and Sidi Omar by the care XXIII Corps with the 28 *ottobre* and 62nd *Marmarica*; influx of the Armored Brigade and XVIII Libyan battalion to Bardia which reserves available to the Commander of the Army; influx to Tobruk, available to XXII Corp of the 61st *Sirte* and the four 149/13 groups of the 25th artillery group; transfer of a division of the Tripolitania Corps to Cyrenaica. Of these measures, some of those on Libyan divisions, and the XXI to XXIII Corps -they were in practice already in place; others lagging behind; It is inexplicable persistence of the Armored Brigade at Marsa Lucch and the 25th artillery grouping between Cyrene and Derna, not to mention the 20th group still in Benghazi.

On the British side, meanwhile O'Connor wanted to push as much as possible to the north before sunset the 16th British Brigade, to gain time. During the night the brigade was to be joined by two artillery regiments and the 7th Tanks. The 7th Armored Division had the 4th Armored Brigade in the area of Azzaziya, thus able to prevent any meeting between 64th *Catanzaro* and the 3 *gennaio* and take part of the new investment objective. The support group was still south and controlled easily the direction from Rabia and Sofafi, and the 7th Armored Brigade, always in reserve, he was taken to the central area.

Sidi el-Barrani had grown as the logistics base of the 10th Army. The concentration in that locality - besides that of the Bug Bug depots of rations , ammunitions, water, fuels and various material,

had resulted in the necessity of a perimeter defense that, because of the dispersion of the organs of the services suggested by reasons of safety and the opportunity to incorporate the local airfield, he had assumed a deployment of over twenty kilometers. It is clear that in these conditions everything became burdensome, especially since the reverse side of the first line he had been prepared according to a narrower range. Speaking of the cornerstones was simple way of saying, however the belt perimeter included five cornerstones of battalion rather forward and that back three. The possibility of reaction dynamics were nonexistent. The artillery were translated into regiment of the 3 *gennaio* (two groups of 75/27 and one of 100/17), a group of 105/28, two groups of 77/28 of the 1st Libyan in the process of arriving, a couple of companies to 47/32 antitank and a group of 75 CK anti-aircraft.

At about 05³⁰ on Gen. Lomax, commander of the English 16th Brigade, decided not to wait for either the 7th *Tanks*, nor the two artillery regiments, which appeared late (sketch n. 12). The Italian field defenses were in serious state of inferiority in front of the *Matilda* and the 25 pounder guns, but not against the infantry, the light tanks and the guns of small caliber, so that the first British attempt, launched with the help a violent sandstorm that reduced visibility to a minimum, was repulsed with considerable losses. Except at 08:30 they went into action the 31st Field artillery and the British 7th Heavy Field, who immediately silenced or nearly so the many batteries, whose fire at close range had contributed to the first resistance. Then, arrived one squadron of *Matilda*, began the attack. The intervention of R.A.F. He gave impetus to the enemy progression. The 16th brigade was pressing with the three battalions in line, which was added to the IV/ 6th *Rajputana* Rifles of the 5th Indian Brigade, and at about 13:00 the camicie nere of the western and southern areas suddenly gave way. Exceeded even the forward-deployed artillery, attackers permanently blocked from the west and south access routes to Sidi el-Barrani. Meanwhile, on the left of the 16th Brigade was taking place the 11th Indian Brigade. Beresford-Peirse decided abandon the capture, because, thanks to the excellent arrangements of O'Connor, he could count on the collaboration of the 4th Armored Brigade. Sure by now was not to fear any Italian initiative from Sidi el-Barrani, he established that the 2nd *Royal Tanks* moved in reinforcing to the 7th, he had many tanks which were stopped for damage, and the 6th *Royal Tanks* marched on the rear of the battalions of the 16th

[illegible]

brigade, along all the front, for giving a hand to the Selby group to east of Sidi el-Barrani.

The new effort had beginning around 16:00 with support of all the divisional artillery and part of that from the army corps. At this point it is superfluous to make a force ratios calculation. At 17:30 the Libyan divisions group Commander and the Commander of the 3 *gennaio* were captured and the organized resistance could say to have been defeated. At 18:00 there remained the eastern field of the field entrenchments held by units of the 1st Libyan and 3 *gennaio* and, still, the strong point of Ras El-Dai by the 2nd Libyan. Before midnight the 6th *Tanks*, simultaneous with the troops movements of Selby against the last resistances, but the reaction of the few remained batteries was such that the regiment remained with seven *cruisers* and six light tanks ⁽⁷⁴⁾. It was the last action. The next morning, when the English guns reopened fire, the resistance stopped. In the late morning Ras El-Dai also surrendered.

In Rome the atmosphere was leaden. On 4 December Gen. Soddu, that on 9 November he had assumed the Commander Superiore of the Armed Forces in Albania, had made a very depressing telephone call to Gen. Guzzoni, the new undersecretary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the undersecretary for war, on the current situation. Gen. Cavallero, named Chief of General Staff replacing Mar. Badoglio, had been urgency sent there by Mussolini, which he calmed had been totally lost. The gravity of the news coming from Tirana appeared to him such to be considering separate from the events of the North African front. On 10 December Ciano wrote in his diary:

"News of the attack on Sidi Barrani comes like a thunderbolt. At first it does not seem serious, but subsequent cables of Graziani confirm that we have taken a beating. Mussolini, whom I see twice, is very calm. He comments on the events with impersonal objectivity. It almost seems that what has happened does not concern him in the least, he being more preoccupied with Graziani's prestige, and ready to overlook the seriousness of what has happened.

But it is serious, at home and abroad. It is serious outside of Italy because from the tone of Graziani's cables it does not appear that he has sufficiently recovered from the blow to prepare a counterattack. Inside Italy, the bad news is compounded. Public opinion has already been much too shaken and divided to receive this new and heavy blow" ⁽⁷⁵⁾. {Page 403 }

Indeed messages that during the day of the 10th flocked to the Comando Superiore exceeded the worst forecasts. At 18:30 Graziani ordered by phone for Gariboldi to withdraw the 63rd *Cirene* and 64th *Catanzaro* to the Sollum-Halfaya positions. The first few enemy thrusts had hitherto rejected without any difficulty. Arriving around midnight the order to retreat, it began the movement at 4 am, when the moonlight disappeared, reserving the few vehicles remaining the transport of heavier weapons and ammunition. The 157th infantry, which occupied positions Alam er-Rabia and hill 236, had the task of acting as rearguard. The movement broke contact with the enemy, because the 11th Hussars, committed to prevent or report any retreat, as a result of misunderstanding in the night returned to Bir Enba. In return, the march was slow and painful because of the terrain, now sandy then pebbly, and the overloaded soldiers, forced to carry many heavy weapons and arms to pull the pieces of 47/32 and 65/17 ⁽⁷⁶⁾. Although disturbed by air strikes, around 14:00 of 11 December, the first elements of the 63rd *Cirene* reached the forward strongpoint of the 62nd *Marmarica* at Neqb Mad'an, where they found the supplies truck column back from Bug Bug, via Halfaya, which were immediately unloaded and sent to meet the column. A new incursion near Neqb Mad'an caused the marching troops sensitive losses. At 24:00, according to a new order, the division and the garrison of the stronghold resumed retreat to the Halfaya. Even this part was done regularly, although under a cold and impetuous wind. The 63rd *Cirene* repelled with artillery action an episode of mechanized elements near Alam Battuma (a dozen kilometers from Halfaya) and came into place after covering 60 kilometers in 36 hours (the units from Bir er Rabia circa 75 kms).

The 64th *Catanzaro*, instead, had fate much more tormented. The evening of the 10th they had received the order from the Commander of the Army to retreat tomorrow during the night to Sollum "*with pause at Bir Tishdida*", roughly halfway. It was located to south-east of Bug Bug on level ground and without tactical holds, in a irregular theater of cooperating strong points more or less: four for the 141st infantry in the area Bir Nasid-Alam el Rimth; three for the 142nd infantry, very spaced, at Iluet el Qatar, Bir Oases ⁽⁷⁷⁾ and Alam Samalus; one, more to the rear, for the division Command. Moreover it had also absorbed the logistics center of Bug Bug and absorbed the defense troops of the depot and received its reinforcements. The initial machine-gunner squadrons and 77 mm. group, had

joined during the morning of the 9th by the LXIII light tank battalion, then, in the night by, two *camicie nere* battalions of the 28 *ottobre*, one machine-gun company, the I/201st artillery with 100/17, the II/202nd artillery with 75/27 and the XX light tank battalion. Breaking contact was achieved without inconvenience. They had to abandon four 77 mm. guns and much ammunition. Between 08:30 and noon the division was concentrated at Tishdida preparing to resume the march at dusk. It is not that, Graziani, which the evening before had disapproved of the pause arranged by the Commander of the Army because of the impending danger, as soon as seen by aerial reconnaissance that the 64th *Catanzaro* and stops resulted in the course of temporary accommodation with security measures between the new road completed in November and the existing runway three kilometers north of that road, intervened with a message sent by air:

"Army Command has communicated to you this night where to stop this is only in order to grant to you rest in your march. Therefore your pause has no tactical scope. Aerial reconnaissance says that numerous mechanize means proceed to you from Sidi el-Barrani towards the west. It is necessary therefore that you resume at once your march include there the sea-Halfaya deployment (...) the Army will send the same order to you. Do not lose precious time".

That was at 14:30. Gen. Amico did not have in time not to reflect since he himself saw the arrival of the armored cars of the 11th Hussars and, the wheeling of, the 7th armored brigade of Gen. Russel ⁽⁷⁸⁾. The unequal struggle faced by the 64th *Catanzaro* was essentially conducted by the artillery that they began to shoot pointing direct, inflicting on the opponent "*rather hard losses in tanks*" ⁽⁷⁹⁾, but after two hours Amico was forced to order the units not yet overwhelmed to take to the road to break through in the direction of Sollum. After nightfall, under a third of men with little material he was able to earn the lines of XXIII Corp. The division, as such, was no more in a position to becoming part of the defense of the embankment and the arrival of its remains had psychological repercussions "*that weighed seriously, later on, also on the efficiency of the garrison of Bardia*" ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

On the morning of the 12th the situation was as follows. The 2nd CC.NN. division 28 *ottobre*, that since the 5th had collected at Sollum nearly the entirety of its own units, scattered for roadwork from Sidi el-Barrani to Berta ⁽⁸¹⁾, had unenthusiastically organized a obstruction of the Halfaya pass to the sea, enduring the cannonade

of the usual three British ships. These followed with much efficiency the developments of the operations, absolutely undisturbed from the reaction of one battery of 120/35 and one of from 149/35 from Sollum, reaction was totally platonic giving the limits of range and the poor visibility. Neither however was it possible to use the resource of torpedo bombers since only six existed in Libya which turned out placed out of use on the field of el-Adem by a violent aerial bombing. The 62nd *Marmarica* division was found from Halfaya to Gabr bu Fares. On the back, in the second row, in order to cope with penetrations through one or the other large unit, he had arranged the just recovered 63rd *Cirene*. Still more behind, the 1st CC.NN. division 23 marzo, already at Wadi el-Mrega to south of Bardia, had taken position to the north-west of Sollum, from Fort Capuzzo to the sea, with a detachment at Sidi Omar ⁽⁸²⁾. The Armored Brigade was now to south of Bardia, but under command of the Comando Superiore the III tank battalion, the only one equipped with M 13, was pushed forward, in correspondence of the issues of the roads of Sollum and Halfaya.

At the same time he moved feverishly on rearrangement of his rear. All 47/32 pieces available supplied by the Intendenza were sent to Bardia (20 guns) and to Tobruk (18 guns). The garrison of this fortress was further upgraded with a metropolitan battalion, one complement of Libyan, a group of 75/46 from the 63rd *Cirene*, two groups of 105/28 from Barce, one of 75/27 in part from Barce and part from Benghazi.

The exploitation of the success had been entrusted by O' Connor to the 7th Armored Division. It had not been able to prevent the tidy withdraw of the 63rd *Cirene*, but it had been followed by the 64th *Catanzaro*. Now, 12 Decembers, the 7th Armored Brigade was momentarily stopped in order to start the evacuation of the prisoners, but the 4th Armored Brigade, continuation with the support group and preceded by the omnipresent 11th Hussars, had made contact with the 62nd *Marmarica* and, with some elements, reaching the boarder fence circling around Gabr bu Fares. Before a perspective withdraw on a grand scale of the entire XXIII Corps, Graziani ordered the engineer Commander to prepare several interruptions on the Balbia road, from Tobruk to Benghazi, and to the 5th Army to place in the maximum efficiency the entrenched field of Tripoli and withdrawing all the mobile troops, leaving only the system of cover on the Tunisian frontier unchanged and unchanged the dispositions already given for the shipment of the 60th *Sabratha* Inf. Div. to Derna. Then he addressed the Comando Supremo

"It is confirmed the rout of the [64th] *Catanzaro* division that in part having withdraw on the Halfaya line, in part still resists locked from all sides at Bir Tishdida. The [63rd] *Cirene* division having continued its withdraw from the heights onto the [62nd] *Marmarica* division in good order this morning. Interceptions give: 1st that the 7th Armored additionally have had orders from the English Commander to occupy Sollum; 2nd that at 08:45 hours begun movement in a eastward direction to the north-west astride the Sofafi-Halfaya track & that is to say at behind the [63rd] *Cirene*.

Aerial reconnaissance gives on same the moment the mass estimated at approximately 200 medium tanks continuation from other had in effects begun quick movement towards Halfaya to obvious the scope to invest the [63rd] *Cirene* division. It must be presumed in consequence that enemy wants to bypass resistance from the heights in order to continue towards Sollum then hitting against the alignment of the 23 *marzo* and 28 *ottobre* divisions.

During the day yesterday I saw to the flow to said alignment of reinforcements artillery & the last armor reserves at my disposition that is to say a M 13 tank armed battalion. If also this enemy maneuver succeeds it is to presume successive investment Fort Bardia that is insufficiently fortified. After that it would not remain but extreme resistance at Fort Tobruk where all possible means is to be re-united having been lined up already since yesterday.

The English fleet runs freely on the sea. This morning it is found at Ras Azeiz. The Air Force continues to be at almost unable to act from adverse weather. Threatens to sweep away the entire Cyrenaica front it is evident. I have given orders to the 5th Army at Tripoli to put in to principle efficiency that entrenched field withdrawing all mobile troops & leaving the western frontier system cover unchanged. The engineers prepare interruptions on road for Benghazi.

After recent events that can be anticipated upcoming I would consider it my duty to sacrifice instead of my useless person on the spot, take me to Tripoli, if I succeed, at least to keep high on the Castle the flag of Italy, waiting for Motherland put me in conditions to continue operate. From me to the last soldier have deep consciousness have made all efforts to resist after those made by me to understand at Rome what were the actual conditions of this theater of operations and the means to tackle them widely without putting man with the rifle & with very little anti-tank means in conditions to support the fight of a flea against the elephant. Both said this at my memory testamentary & because everyone assumes the responsibility before history in just what happens here today" ⁽⁸³⁾
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In Rome the astonishment and alarm was by now spreading. On the 11th Ciano had written:

"Things are really going badly in Libya. Four divisions can be considered destroyed, and Graziani, who reports on the spirit and the decision of the enemy, say nothing about what he can do to parry the blow. Mussolini becomes more and more calm. He maintains that the many painful days through which we are living must be considered inevitable in the changing fortunes of every war. He still hopes that Graziani can and will stop the English advance. If it can be stopped at the old boundary, he thinks the situation will not be serious; if the English should reach Tobruk, then he thinks "the situation tragic".

On the evening news arrives that the [64th] *Catanzaro* Division did not hold against the English push but was itself torn to pieces. (...)." ⁽⁸⁴⁾. {Page 403}

Indeed they were gone two Libyan divisions, one *Camicie Nere*, one metropolitan, a battle-group and numerous support units of various types. In one respect it was not losing too much: the structure of the three special major units was even inferior to that one of the "binary", so that the strength of this average force present did not reach 6,000 men and still smaller was that of the Maletti group. But on the other hand the significance of the defeat was serious. The army had lost from the blow half of the mobile troops, good part of the materials amassed for the advance on Marsa Matruh, three groups of 105 mm. (the best pieces), a dozen medium tanks and several hundred vehicles. To the question with which Ciano closed the page of his diary on 11 December: "*Something is the matter with our army if five divisions let themselves be pulverized in two days?*" There was a sad and simple answer: the operational instrument prepared to fight in North Africa was not quite able to hold its own against an opponent much lower forces but, comparatively, much better equipped with weapons of war. All the highest leaders can say they had knowledge, but all, without exception, had felt that defensive operations could be sustained without excessive worries and at some point they had even shown signs of arrogance and full confidence Mussolini now beginning to feel the weight of the events: "In Libya we have suffered a real defeat" he commented. And, soon after: *This time it will not be said that politics is to blame. I left the military authorities the greater freedom of action*" ⁽⁸⁵⁾ {Page 403}. He lied, purely and simply. Suffice it to read the messages of solicitation sent to Graziani. But the failure to understand what would be the war in the desert would be unfair to make him guilty. However, the "*catastrophic cable from Graziani has arrived, a mixture of excitement, rhetoric and concern*" ⁽⁸⁶⁾ made his mark. Ciano, called to the Palazzo Venezia; he found the Duce "*very stricken*" ⁽⁸⁷⁾ {Page 404} even though his answer was calm:

"As always and more than always I count on You. Between Bardia and Tobruk there are sufficient guns and men in order to smash the attack enemy. Also the enemy is subordinate to usury. In good time will allow the employment of aviation on a vast scale. Infuse to all, from generals to the soldiers, unshakable decision of the supreme hours" ⁽⁸⁸⁾.

Graziani had committed another large psychological error: the hint to move to Tripoli. It will be reproached later. During the 12th he continued to issue orders.

At 11:00; the 28 *ottobre* had to withdraw to Bardia and they were to assume the defense (order then revoked), the Armored Brigade to move itself from Bardia to Sidi Azeiz to protect the exposed flank of the Army and at Benghazi it was necessary to predispose a primary defense on the Derna *Wadi* in order to prevent, or at least to delay eventual infiltrations of enemy mechanized elements.

At 16:00; reordering of the Commands. The XXIII Corps took the two militia divisions 23 *marzo* and 28 *ottobre*, the XXI Corps the two metropolitan divisions 63rd *Cirene* and 62nd *Marmarica*, the Commander of the 64th *Catanzaro* assumed the responsibility of Bardia.

At 19:00; as a result of the news of the presence of English elements on the road between Halfaya and Musaid, new orders to the major units. The XXIII Corps took over the command also of the 63rd *Cirene* and the 62nd *Marmarica*. The order, sent by messenger directly to Gen. Bergonzoli and for information to Gen. Gariboldi, stated the convenience of realizing a unified defense throughout the quadrilateral Fort Capuzzo - Sollum - Halfaya crossroad - Halfaya and the necessity to demolish every enemy attempt to smash in towards Bardia. To the Armored Brigade, then, was entrusted the dynamics reaction from Sidi Azeiz in direct support of Bardia is against any infiltration from the gates of Sidi Omar and Bir es Sceferzen.

Undeniably it is a series of measures that, disregarding the hierarchical responsibility, coming to the divisions often late, by changing dependencies, keeping units on the move and always following the enemies' initiative, could not but provoke a sense of uncertainty, not to mention distrust. You get the feeling that from the moment when it was decided the retreat of the XXI Corp was possible to understand in one harmonious -and decisive -Order the sequence of which we have referred. This is led to believe because since 11 December

Graziani did not have illusions on what remained to happen and, he did not believe it very sustainable to fight in the open field. Gen. Gariboldi, for his part, had directives defense to the bitter end of the two "Fortresses."

"In the current situation, well known to you, the task entrusted to the Army is to resist the positions it occupies and to ensure the possession of the fortresses of Tobruk and Bardia.

Are especially to be feared attempts of the enemies armored means operating on the right wing of the army to wrap it up and away from the Fort of Bardia. Arrange, therefore, some movable element arraigned in position to maneuver.

The operation of aircraft will, from today, on request directly from this command to that of the air fleet that you will have to adhere to the extent of its highest possibilities " ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

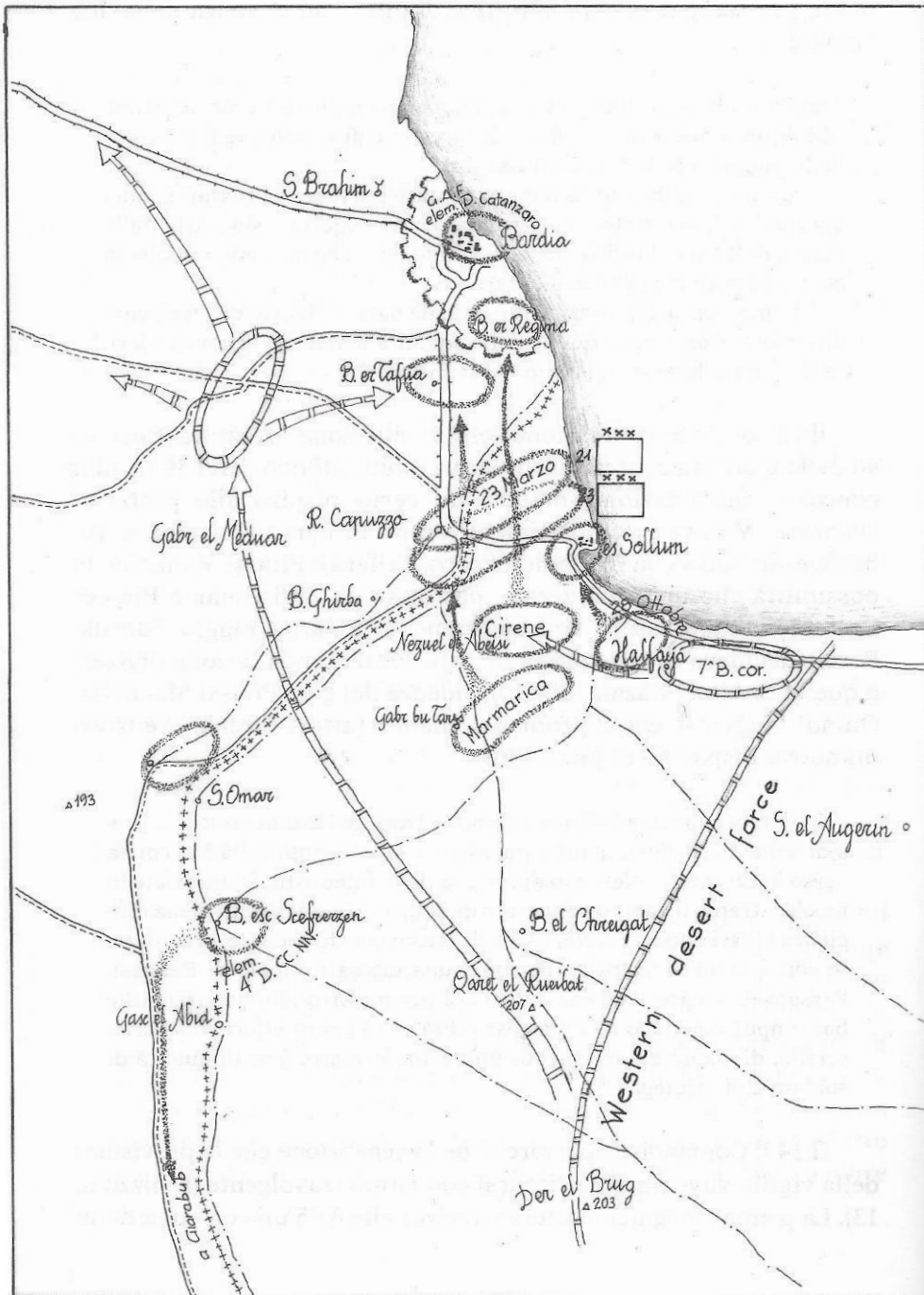
On the 13th the pressure of the 7th Armored Division continued. In the course of the day local counterattacks Effected with M 13 tanks and the assistance of the air force, directed to clear a breach to the advance positions. While the combats were underway Graziani, at Tobruk, was checking with Gariboldi, Porro, Tellera and Pitassi Mannella, the possibility that armored units, passing from Sidi Omar and Bir esc Sceferzen, exceeded with the wide scope encircling of Tobruk. Therefore he decided to move the Armored Brigade from the area of Azeiz to that of Ain el-Gazala, to the command of Gen. Pitassi Mannella. Therefore he just reached the Cirene tactical Command, where he found new a dispatch from Mussolini:

"Do not worry yourselves of the front towards Tunisia. Leave only garrisons of the G.A.F. Bring all there is efficient of the 5th Army is towards Cyrenaica. In the case of breach of the line put defense into effect until the end of the entrenched field of Tobruk placing in full efficiency the anti-tank ditches. In the event that this gave way, organized as you will coming from the west, a defended field of Benghazi. After the surprise and deplete them with the gradual move away from the basics enemy impulse, is possibility that will allow you, Marshal, to document again your great qualities as a soldier and strategist " ⁽⁹⁰⁾.

On the 14th the Comando Superiore had the feeling that the predictions were fulfilled with overwhelming rhythm (sketch n. 13). The first aerial reconnaissance spotted a column of 8.45 to a

Schizzo n. 13

ATTIVITÀ OPERATIVA DEL 14 DICEMBRE



hundred of mechanized means in motion from Sidi Azeiz towards the coast, reaching at 10:00 the crossroad of Marsa Lucch. At 13:30 English patrols exceeded the coastal embankment to the height of Gambut, to the road half way between Bardia and Tobruk. At dusk mechanized nuclei reached near Sidi Bu Amud, 25 kilometers to east of Tobruk. Various interceptions, then, were to assume that the new offensive would develop almost certainly follow the course of the Trigh Capuzzo. Based on this information, Graziani thought that the enemy did not mean to insist in the attack of the Italian advanced positions at fort Capuzzo-Halfaya, nor to invest the fortress of Bardia, but to penetrate in still more depth towards Tobruk and to the West therefore decided a series of measures understood to prevent the turning of Tobruk, protect the retreat of the logistic device of the Intendenza and the airfields, to avoid elements coming from within the Sahara (Gailo and Marada) could interrupt the costal at the height of Greater Sirte⁽⁹¹⁾. Consequently, he had to proceed to occupy the narrows of Ain el-Gazala with the Armored Brigade and two battalions of the *Sirte* in order to block the coast and the Trigh Capuzzo, the long track from the border reached Benghazi through Marmarica and the plateau of Barce; for the defense of the ridge of Derna so as to cover the evacuation of the warehouses from Derna in Benghazi and airfields from Marmarica west of Derna; for the occupation of the crossroads of el-Agheila and Marada with the first of the elements coming from the 60th *Sabratha* from Tripolitania. Moreover Graziani thought it useful to suggest to Gariboldi to make:

"Maneuver on the enemy's left side by our counterattacks departing from both Halfaya and both forts. So I think that you could make extreme attempts to delay enemy march columns with counterattacks by motorized means departing especially from Halfaya & from Bardia, especially for having goals of enemies supplies columns. Let commanders decision about which direction the time & launch in relationship situation. Of course aviation should always give its aid. Reminded to all that the Duce's dispatch said to resist to the bitter end & that he has absolute confidence that commandos & troops will make every effort in order that the enemy does not prevail"⁽⁹²⁾.

Gariboldi did not withdraw and answers dryly: "*I transmitted your phonogram 01/3363 Op. to the interested commanders. I do, however, present paucity of suitable means*"⁽⁹³⁾, Graziani was evidently discouraged and exasperated. The words of flattery from Mussolini, were far from encouraging him,

they sounded circumstantial. He felt abandoned after being misunderstood. The little veiled accusation, "*After the surprise ...*", bumped into him more. On impulse, he wrote *from man to man* to the Duce:

"Statements of extreme confidence in me if they can move me can not make me forget myself that it was granted in full before when I tried by all means to make you understand the truth. I've heard. I'm not allowed to talk to you more directly. When I did it through Ciano, who was said by you delegate to afford it directly, you made me recall the Chief of Staff General.

Then you have addressed your October 26 offering me way out that I wanted to have the moral cowardice of follow continuing to remain in my position of great responsibility. You have continued to listen to those who will either tricked you or deliberately have deceived you. I have been portrayed as having become incapable, inept, concerned only to save my point of arrival. Everything I know, facts and names.

At the moment of supreme responsibility before history and the Motherland my hour is now but extremely miserable but necessary legitimacy to talk man to man. You have misunderstood me after my return from the Empire. You called me then to a function of Chief of Staff Army without giving me a chance to do it freely, undermined at all of you. I alone I then had the nerve to not delude ever. Then you sent me here without giving me even the breath to speak. You have forgotten that for many years I have served with devotion & faith without limits. Have you forgotten that if the Ethiopian victory was possible this was due to the fact of allowing me to speak freely, skipping all the villains that I would have wanted to prohibit. Now, Duce, that there is a referee, the fate, the superior forces which I can no longer put up my human ones, that until the last moment I will vibrate in me & in all the others. Discount liabilities created not by my blindness or will, but from that of all those who have betrayed you miserably & with you Italy " ⁽⁹⁴⁾.

According to the report of Ciano, Mussolini remained "*calm and indignant*". For the replacement of Graziani, whose stay in a leadership role after this letter was no longer eligible, he wanted to wait for it to pass the critical moment, and probably did not dare to remove a second marshal of Italy in a couple of weeks. Once again he skipped it. He was inspired by recent precautionary orders given by the Comando Superiore in order to answer:

The dispositions that you have taken convinces me that the game can have a endings different from as the English hope and above all allow me to admire your serenity and that of the troops whose action is continuation with extreme emotion & hope from all the Italian people. Above all I confirm your order to defend to the bitter end the "fortresses" Bardia & Tobruk. Enemy must be forced to slow down & to pause. The 300 men of the garrison of Narwik will resist for beyond a month the siege of ten thousand enemy. Marshal Graziani the past is past, those that counts is the future & the salvation of the Cyrenaica" ⁽⁹⁵⁾.

A few hours later, in order to explain a his telegram of the 14th directed to Gen. Cona, temporary commander of the 5th Army, so that he immediately placed on alert the fortress of Tripoli and the border works, Mussolini sent another dispatch with an important directive. Before he cleared that alarm which been provoked from the government crisis burst without warning in Vichy and then annulled with the entrance of Flandin into the government; therefore he added that, if necessary, he could be reached freely at the 5th Army *"in order to make, in the worse case of the hypotheses, of the escarpment of Derna, to my for information unsurpassable warning personal & the definitive area of stopping the advancing enemy"* ⁽⁹⁶⁾.

Graziani replied controversy that if he had the necessary means of transport he would have carried the entire 5th Army to the Cyrenaica front, exceeding the 1,500 kilometers of distance. He arranged, instead, only a few hundreds of trucks with which he was transferring, in groups, the 60th *Sabratha* Inf. Div. in order to control the zone Agedabia-el Agheila-Marsa Brega ⁽⁹⁷⁾. And, with another message in explicit reference to that one of Mussolini, emphasized that, as already said previously, the putting to defense of the escarpment of Derna was en route. But he wanted to specify that such natural obstacle, of for if fortified until the head of the pit formed from the Derna *Wadi*, was at least around the three roads, from which, Mechili-ez Zeiat-Zauia - Benina, adduced directly to Benghazi. In this telegram there was a phrase with which probably meant to put the hands ahead to avoid illusions. Instead it was revealed unpleasantly prophetic: *"with medium armor & the motorized English you are at this point to awaiting the improbable repeat"*.

The liabilities were already remarkable. According to the British official report the *Western Desert Force* in the three days from the 9 to 11 Decembers lost 624 men altogether and captured not less than 38,000 prisoners, 237 guns, 73 light or medium tanks and more than

one thousand of motor vehicles ^{(99)*}, given lack of specify from an Italian source, but those of the English appear reliable, with the warning in the count of antiaircraft guns are comprised also the machine-guns of 20 millimeter and that, for nearly the totality, of the tanks were light. In conclusion of the report on the battle of Sidi el-Barrani Wavell wrote:

"This shining success can be attributed to good cooperation between the Armed Forces, the effect of surprise, excellent action of command and demonstrated combative quality from all the personnel.

Our equipment, in particular the infantry tanks, the cruiser tanks and 25 pounder guns were revealed excellent" ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾.

It is worth the pain to consider which level has been reached under such aspects from the Italian side.

a). *The cooperation between the Armed Forces*, in practice referable only to the army and the air force, it did not turn out free from gaps and, consequently, from recriminations and controversies, even if not as strongly derived as during the campaign of Greece. The beginning of operation *Compass* was constituted from a very studied aerial offensive, that assured immediately to the formations of air commander Collishaw a precious predominance. To this add the quality of the aircraft "*the superiority of the Hurricane to the Italian fighter CR 42 was clear*" ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ and the adverse weather conditions that were intensified in the salient moments of the fight, evidence, moreover, of relative weight in as far as a common factor for the two adversaries. It is certain that from the beginning of the action the manifestly failed to contrast the *Western Desert Air Force* in spite of the strenuous demands for participation on part of the Libyan divisions and the XXI Army Corps. "*Subsequently the Italian air forces became more active - observing the enemy - doing their best to giving some breath of relief to the disorganized units of the army, and towards the 15th they remarkably disturbed the [English] troops if inflicted limited damage*" ⁽¹⁰²⁾. The first telegram for Mussolini, when rendering an account of the amplitude and the violence of the attack of O'Connor, named as an aerial example: "*They are sure that you will make the air force act in mass, especially if favorable weather and will be for the entire day*" ⁽¹⁰³⁾, but the answer of Graziani was a appeal for aid: the efficiency of the 5th Air Fleet had been considerably reduced and by the strain of war and the sudden offense on the airfields, such that on 10 December there were available only 45 bombers, 6 torpedo bombers,

*foot not #98 does not appear in the original text

12 Ground Attack and 68 Fighters, including the aircraft in flowing in from Tripolitania (nearly all those located there), Therefore, presupposing the events more and more serious and intense rhythm, is necessary needing immediate reinforces from Italy in order "*to allow the troops to resist & slowing enemy momentum*" ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. In truth the data reported from the Comando Superiore had been the proceeds from hurried and imprecise signaling of 5th Air Fleet Command; in fact, the efficient airplane at such date amounted to 71 bombers, 4 torpedo bombers, 24 Ground Attack and 107 Fighters ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. However Gen. Pricolo, now interested, telegraphed to Gen. Porro reassuring him on the shipment of reinforces and advising him to intensify above all the offense on the British air force bases, easier to say than to do for several reasons: the land situation already had been made the bitter end worrisome, the opposing *Hurricane* was much too strong and the advanced fields beyond frontier were in course of abandonment. Also neglecting, but, the real possibilities, seem of being able to assert that gaps existed just in the premises for a valid air-ground cooperation. In other words, the demand for part of one division to participation in the sky of the action - provided that weather conditions or enemy aviation did not hinder it - too much time passed. Length of the bureaucratic *procedures*, encryption and decryption of messages, insufficient reliability of the system of the transmissions, all influenced negatively on the timeliness of the aerial competition. And, with regard to, a meaningful decision taken by Graziani on 12 December: that the Command of the 10th Army directly asked the 5th Fleet participations, without to passing through the Comando Superiore.

b. *The surprise*. The general atmosphere was of preparation for the resumption of the advance on Marsa Matruh, with limited worries of a "exited time" on part of O'Connor. Some expressed, its true, pessimistic doubts and forecasts, but undeniably nobody imagined until that point the passage of Bir Enba would have been fatal and with how much violence the enemy would have known and been able to concentrate the effort on objectives addressed in succession of phases. No Command, in fact, from the Supreme to those of the divisions, took *adequate* provisions for the immediate perception of the preliminary matters of an attack and the fast transmission of the news. For as much as the aviation had reported during the entire month of November circa the concentrations of vehicles in the western desert, it cannot itself be asserted that aerial recognition had been well addressed by

collecting sure elements to support of one or the other hypothesis. The probability of a massive offensive had been discarded without hesitation. That, after all, conclusion was not a completely deranged. O'Connor attacked with only two divisions plus one in potential. The trouble was that the two-three divisions were not being of the *weight* of the Libyan divisions or militia, and either of the Italian metropolitan "binary". It is from complaining but that neither the Comando Superiore nor the Command of the 10th Army has placed itself, as it seems, the question: "and if English attack with two or three of their strong divisions therefore, as soon as two or three fortnight of which he seems to have available, as a response?". The hypothesis could be considered less probable, but surely it was most dangerous. Of usual in war signaling apt reach the Commands to support either of theses: the difficulty resides in their appraisal. And also on a single hypothesis often many contrasting news arrived: all *can* be convincing indications, but all of them are not. The difficult one is in its *realization* - sometimes it is just the exact term - which is just the symptom. It cannot be put in doubt that Graziani had perceived the danger: he had spoken some of them with Berti and Gariboldi, however the councils and the opinions are one thing, orders another, and, to depart from the consideration that orders are preferable to councils, Graziani demonstrated *ad abundantiam** that when he truly wanted something did not hesitate to jump over two hierarchical levels. The last factor of the surprise: the *Matilda*, factor, themselves attend well, deemed also by English judgment ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. For this he can not be blamed on Command. It is also disappointing that the size of a tank so unusual at the time escaped the informants SIM in Egypt.

c. *The action of command.* He probably did not introduce one clear character of firmness against a multitude of reasons: the pressures of Mussolini based on illusory political or political-military guarantees; the acquiescence not convinced and the convictions not firmly supported from Graziani; the lack of harmony between Supreme Commander and Commander of the 10th Army; a vision operational uncertain, a kind of inferiority complex in the comparisons of the adversary interrupted every so often by a strange bursts of under-appraisal. We say at once that the responsibilities of Graziani - Chief of the General Staff of the Army are by far greater of those of Graziani - Supreme Commander, even if the operating attributions overseas were entirely assigned to the Supreme commanders who were accommodating directives only from the Comando Supremo. The fact is as

*Latin = "To abundance."(1) To a great degree; in great measure.(2) For the purpose of showing a great profusion.

the course of the war initiatives, at least at first, were is connected with the accuracy of preparation of the operating instrument. In our case the preparation was replaced from the political presupposition that the war was already won by Germany. The consequences will therefore assume an inevitable character. All the military experts of war of armor and critics were in agreement on judging the impossibility success of Graziani without a valid support of armored and motorized troops ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾. The miniscule light tanks, the unsatisfactory M 11 tanks, the qualitative deficiencies of the artilleries, the road haulage of lucky units more than the major units: the sum of all these elements could not give life to complex *mechanized* forces worthy of the name. Careful analysis of the "colonne celeri" reveals to be dealing with an expedient, not a tactical solution. They could be successfully useful against motorized units because of the fire distribution that they were in a position to develop, but not more. In open terrain, wide practicable, to them any real attitude to the maneuver and the static resistance lacked, therefore they would have been easy prey to any formation of tanks whatever. However it does not seem in their power to avoid some remark. It has been seen with much accuracy Wavell had made the proof of the facts operation *Compass*, he had studied a detailed tactical list for the infantry tanks and as a convenient was always proceeded slowly in employing the newly arrived units in order to grant period for them of amalgam, except in cases of particular necessity. Well, clear from the Italian side the training was not in place on a pre-eminent plan therefore. The natural atmosphere was atypical, the resource to the convoys unavoidable, the local defense on extended desert more than probable, the combat against armored forces sure, the doctrine insufficient or employment not applicable, nevertheless at the moment therefore the Italian deployment, such that it was level, it already contained in it the presuppositions for failure. Not that the issue had been neglected or ignored. Gen. Berti circulated many training directives and considered also the defensive necessities, but the tactical and training answer lacked for two concrete problems:

1st which was the best way in order to resist in the open field an attack of cruisers (the *Matilda* was probably unimaginable)?

2nd as smashing in the opposing lines rendered in vain the sure intervention of the armored reserve?

However certain the situation seemed that sooner or later,

willingly or unwillingly, we would have had to face these problems. And it is certain that we found ourselves to confront them without having them resolved. Some meaningful example. The possibility and, therefore, the danger of a turning were automatically offers by the terrain; for to oppose their "defended area" had therefore to return to a conception type or to one linear structure with supported flanks to the sea or to one fortress and with the other guaranteed, so to speak, from a armored reserve disposed to the rear. The first case could seen in the alignment of Sidi el-Barrani, but it was only be a matter of an embryo "defended area", absolutely lacking in consistency. It lacked the calculation that the spaces granted to the enemy, the unitary vision of the employment of fire, the obstacle, the reaction of movement, the transmissions. The second case in hardly the rough sketch defense of the escarpment of Sollum, however, bypassed from the south *Marmarica*, that was foreseeable but to whose care nothing had been predisposed really effective, the thought to run to the defense in the fortresses of Bardia and Tobruk.

To this point it is the case to speak about the armored brigade. Neglecting the light tanks, to the end of 1940 three medium tank battalions were available in North Africa: the I and II with M.11 and the III with M.13. Of these, the II was made part of the Maletti grouping, the other two of the Brigade, located at Marsa Lucch, to the west of Bardia, therefore absolutely outside of the fight. For as the concept to employ the tanks in support to the infantry was dominant, the same decision to constitute the Armored Brigade induces one to think next to the intention of an massed attack. Nevertheless this was absent to Sidi el-Barrani and there will always be in every action until to the battle of Beda Fomm, in February 1941. The continuous movements ordered by Graziani to every hypothesis are notable for turning from enemy side, for which until the last the Brigade it will remain "potent", but not much of a deterrent: "*Faced with the overwhelming superiority of the enemy armored vehicles, gathered towards Sidi Omar, they would surely overwhelm our skimpy Armored Brigade (the only mobile units at my dioposition) decided to withdraw from Sidi Azeiz, before it is engaged by the enemy and overcome (...)*" ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾. Actually if he had faced the enemy from 9 December with all the three medium tank battalions (about seventy of efficient vehicles) he would have been encountered first by the 4th Armored Brigade (about forty of medium *cruisers*) and the 7th *Royal Tanks* (about fifty *Matilda*), at once followed by the 7th Armored Brigade (another forty, at least, medium *cruisers*) and supported by the *close supports* group of a support,

disappearing quickly from the scene of the battle. The idea to constitute *antitank alignments* or *hinges of maneuver* to give easy successive the engagement of the tanks was still to come. Rather, also after the first sad experience, resisted the concept of the small garrisons: as an example, the militia battalion, reinforcements sent by the *23 marzo* to Sidi Omar on 10 December, where, less than a fast withdraw, that could not have in that day considered - as was - and without practical usefulness.

d. *The combative qualities of the units and the materials.* According to Wavell surprise and the demoralization weighed on the resistance of the 10th Army. It is undeniable that if some units reacted tenaciously, let others take discouragement as soon as the disparity of power yields the obvious. However it is to remark also another observation made by the enemy: in these first combats, on the whole, the Italian artillery fight better then the infantry. Of such importance, that it will be repeated later on also, we will return to the operational cycle during the conclusion. On the materials there is little to saying. Nobody of was allowing the 10th Army the superiority; in numbers, when it existed, was rendered useless from the heterogeneity and; from the quality as in the case of the field artillery. In some circumstance but, defects of the material added to deficiencies of employment or organization. As an example, the 47/32 antitank guns were lacking in a shield - that it was revealed extremely harmful for serving - and the ability to penetrate the armor-piercing shells was naturally variable in relation to the type of enemy tank. Now, if in practice such guns were insufficient against the *Matilda*, it can not equally be said in the comparisons of *cruisers* and the *Mk VI*, but it would have been necessary a much more intense and specific training in order to make fire at close distance. Moreover, also without to decide of reliable figures, it is rightful to point out to the disapproval of some commanders via the insufficient availability of armor-piercing supply. A last note on the issue of motor vehicles: probably something lacking in the system logistic. All major units of the XXI Army Corps and of the Libyan Divisions Group found in enormous difficulties of movement. In the reports compiled on the battle are recurrent the putting in evidence of the harshness of the engagements for the supplies (motor vehicles and escorts) to Bug Bug and to Bardia and for the Mobil columns in reserve. For lack of data to we are not in a position to conduct an investigation in depth, but seems legitimate to doubt the organization of the transports had not received the best solution,

Apart from this, come to my attention that on December 9 the convoys were usually on the road for supplies clear evidence of surprise-and, consequently, almost all were destroyed or captured by the enemy. Moreover, surely it was harmful the high percentage of failures and poor potential of car repair shops and, perhaps, the location of the latter.

3. THE BATTLE OF BARDIA, (3-5 JANUARY 1941)

As has been seen on the evening of the 12th Graziani had decided to put the forces on the Egyptian frontier under the orders to Gen. Bergonzoli, recovering the Command of the XXI Corps. the XXIII Army Corps was lined up on their initial positions: the 28 *ottobre* held in Sollum Bassa and Sollum Alta to defend of the coastal road and the Halfaya pass, the 23 *marzo* was subdivided between Musaid, Fort Capuzzo, Sidi Omar and other small border garrisons, the 62nd *Marmarica* held the escarpment of Halfaya. But a strong column of the 28 *ottobre* with the XLII Light Tank Battalion sent on 11 December to Bug Bug in aid to the 64th *Catanzaro* had been overwhelmed with it, the residual of the 64th *Catanzaro* streamed demoralized, the 63rd *Cirene* was arriving on groups in state of sensitive physical exhaustion, the first British patrols were infiltrating themselves here and there and the picture of the events that was possible to reconstruct on the base of the fragmentary communications appeared in dark colors.

What's more the connections with the Commander of the Army were precarious and irregular. On the front the news, the totally accidental, transfer of the Armored Brigade towards Ain el-Gazala, that left the right flank of the XXIII Corps uncovered, on the 14th Bergonzoli determined the withdraw to the neighbor of Bardia. Circulated the warning to the employed divisions, requested the authorization of the army: "(...) *Given communications breakdown Bardia-Tobruk & scarcity provisions - fuel designed tonight folding my elements within Fortified town Bardia. I gave all provisions subject to confirmation after your instructions known*". At 19:00, an hour before the beginning of the movement, arrived a long note from the Commander of the Army. An error of encryption rendered difficult the reading of the message, Though this suggested, among other things, "*to keep in mind that the position of Halfaya lend to our actions counter-offensives to the rear & flank of the enemy*". Bergonzoli did not hesitate and gave the green light to the first half of the operation, while a part of artillery

opened fire against the English forward positions in order to mask the withdraw. The movement was begun by the 63rd *Cirene* and the 62nd *Marmarica*. The first they went directly to Bardia to strengthen the guard of the works to the frontier in the eastern area (segment Capuzzo-Bardia-sea); the second one was stopped in correspondence of Fort Capuzzo. The 23 *marzo*, lined up in the area of Bir Tafau, to the west of the road for Bardia. Last to move was the 28 *ottobre*, in charge of the withdraw to the escapement of Sollum alta and to blowing up the asphalted road. The withdraw was carried out with order but it had to abandon much material, among which was ammunitions and some pieces of artillery rendered unserviceable. Contrarily to the expectations the morning of 15 December passed calmly enough; in compensation in the afternoon there was manifested strong pressure at Bir Tafau and new units were pointed out going back on the road to Halfaya or flowing towards Sidi Omar. Consequently Bergonzoli requested to continue the withdraw to within the town-walls of Bardia, being useful for a certain pause was realized from the British side.

In the enemy disposition was in fact of course a not an indifferent arrangement. On the morning of 11 December, while, in full euphoria for the brilliant development of operation *Compass*, it was in order to disengage the command of Gen. Beresford-Peirse, O'Connor received from Wilson a message of Wavell with to which it was communicated that the 4th Indian Division with its two brigades, the three regiments of artillery and the transportation units, had to be disengaged from the battle as soon as possible for transferring them to Alexandria and thereafter to leave for the Sudan. "*It was a terrible blow* - O'Connor had then commented - *I had not been forewarned and the news reached to me like a lightning bolt from the blue*". For the Indian Division the 6th Australian Division (Gen. Iven Mackay) would be substituted, of which the 6th brigade was at Naganish Naala, relatively to close at hand, but the bulk was still found in the area of Alexandria. Moreover the Australians had only two field artillery regiments with 18 pounder guns and 4.5 inches howitzers and were incomplete in fact on means of transport. Besides the British 16th Brigade, that was sent to the command of Mackay, in truth he did have available the New Zealand Division, in forward area already for some time, but one of its Brigades were still in Great Britain and Wavell knew the desire of the New Zealand Government who wanted unit employed all together. However the greater disadvantages would have been manifested in the logistical area: it was necessary to withdraw from the battle area the 4th

Indian, to carry the 6th Australian forward, to clear the prisoners who themselves were in greater numbers than presumed and to continue to supply the battle. For the moment O'Connor was preoccupied to vigorously tail the Italian troops in withdraw, taking advantage of water, provisions, fuels and motor vehicles of booty of war. The 7th Armored Brigade had to proceed along the coast and turned back towards Sollum Alta and the Halfaya pass; the 4th Armored Brigade and the 11th Hussars instead had the task to move on the plateau to south of the escapement. These last units, in particular, had and could to penetrate as much as possible in depth. In fact already on 14 December the 11th Hussars had interrupted the Bardia- Tobruk road while the bulk of the 4th Armored Brigade had reached Sidi Azeiz, to the south-west of Bardia, passing between Fort Capuzzo and Sidi Omar, by now isolated, despite the continuous intervention from the Italian Air Force.

Meanwhile Gen. Berti had returned from Italy. Presenting himself in the late evening of the 14th at Cirene, he was informed by Graziani on the situation and the following morning the resuming commander of the 10th Army arriving Tobruk. Seeing the demands of the XXIII Corps Command, he hesitated and made to communicate to the Comando Superiore to ask clarification because the issue did not appear sufficiently clear. Graziani, on the other hand, took part dryly answering that in those circumstances the clarifications were all useless ones and that instead he wanted to know the explicit opinion of the commander of the army. Berti showed incline to join to the purpose of Bergonzoli *"since he was in place to have all elements in order to decide. Now but the consequences that this withdraw can have, in answer I would put that made only for necessity that truly cannot be extended"*. Graziani, who was afraid to see at any moment cut off from Bardia all the troops of Bergonzoli, replied immediately:

"General Bergonzoli has already demonstrated the reasons of obligatory necessities that they induce to such decision without need to repeat them. Observe therefore that he does not have time to lose a minute to approve of what is proposed since every precious hour is for him. Now therefore immediate approval with two words that he broadcast at once & that is: "approved your withdrawal decision there at once." ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

Then briefed the Comando Supremo:

"The advanced formation of Halfaya-sea & Sollum-Capuzzo line threatened

threatened by encirclement on part of enemy medium armor since yesterday amassing in the area of Azeiz & from other units moving for Sollum bassa & Sollum alta he is in total withdraw on Fortress Bardia, which is in its turn isolated from Tobruk & continuously shot at from sky & from the sea. It is to be considered therefore lost all the line of the forward alignment remaining in the absolute impotence to counterattack the enemy armored masses for lack of suitable means to do so, apart from the aviation that alone cannot resolve the problem" ⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

In the first hours of the 16th the units of XXIII Corps completed the withdraw on Bardia without being hindered by the enemy. Naturally the withdrawal of the Capuzzo-Sollum deployment left without support the border garrisons. Therefore those of Bir esc Sceferzen, Maddalena and Garn el-Grein received the order to withdraw on Giarabub, that they will made between 16th and 19th of December. The garrison of Sidi Omar, instead, encircled since from the 13th, was overrun on the 16th by the 7th Hussars and the 2nd *Royal Tanks*, after a heavy bombardment with 25 pounders guns. Therefore O'Connor considerably improved the problem of the logistic support of the 7th Armored Division.

In the course of the day Graziani wanted to give a solution of principle to three problems: operating jurisdiction of the 10th Army, supplying of Bardia and defensive organization of the position of Derna-Berta-Mechili. To the army he left the responsibility of Tobruk and Bardia and of coastal strip between the two localities. In part he was convinced of the necessity to concentrate every attention on the two fortresses, in part was sped up by Mussolini who had flaunt to him the resistance of the 300 Germans at Narvik. In order to emphasize therefore the importance of the task of defense to the bitter end he did not find better than to send the following dispatch to Berti:

"Duce in his directives orders the defense to the bitter end of the fortresses of Bardia and Tobruk. I confirm such order. All the will of the commanders must be stiffened to this purpose. I say to You, Excellency Berti, that I have known Duce, in audience allowed, you to get confirmed his full confidence. It must be proven with the facts in this one supreme try which the fates of the Motherland are tied. And another confidence to absolute nourish & that is to say in the Comando Superiore who not deflect from the will to fight until the end. I will transmit this telegram in its entirety to the Duce" ⁽¹¹¹⁾.

To think this cable action provoked enthusiastic fervor

in the commander of the 10th Army is probably an exaggeration; anyway Graziani - who again took care to inform Mussolini of *his* intention not to deflect and the cable sent to Berti⁽¹¹²⁾ - a few hours later, perhaps thinking that *bis repetita iuvant**, confirm to the Commander of the Army order to hold Bardia and Tobruk to the bitter end, still giving, as it is easy to imagine, news of Mussolini.

The second point was the supplying of Bardia. Considering by now the communications cut with Tobruk and not thinking of having means in order to break the circle that was being tightening around Bardia, it did not remain but to entrust to the Comando Superiore R. Marina and the Intendenza to do the impossible in order to provision the fortress via sea. Moreover, after some days, such solution will be revealed almost impossible and Bardia will have to count only on the supplies existing in it.

The Third point: the system of the strong points of Derna, Berta and Mechili. With regard to the former at Derna was deployed the *10th Bersaglieres*, the V Tank Battalion M/13 (just arrived from Italy) and of three batteries of the R. Marina; at Berta the first group of the 60th *Sabratha* Inf. Div., arriving at the crossroads for Marada. The old Fort of Mechili, then, being occupied by 47/32 guns and a 20 mm. gun units, while the Armored Brigade would have located itself in passing, after to having left at Ain el-Gazala some M.11 tanks in order to defend the airfield from incursions of armored cars.

The aerial reconnaissance signaled a strongly mass of armored vehicles in the area of Bir Enba, a strong mechanized unit around Gabr bu Fares, Bir Chreigat and Bir Zigdin and finally patrols of armored cars explained to fan towards Bardia and Sidi Omar and Bir esc Sceferzen. They did not make to face a new battle for the uncertain outcome or even that already compromise. There was worse in the game: a route of escape was not noticed on the entire North African theater of operations. Without armored and motorized divisions did not appear possible to oppose the enemy, this by now was unequivocal; the only unit available was the shabby Babini brigade that, apart from its use piecemeal, valid only for the M 13; from Italy there was little to hope for; dominion of the air and the sea was British. In short, only Germany, whose aid had been so thoughtlessly minimized, could take part in order to straighten the state of the things. However, he admitted that he wanted and that it was possible to cross the Mediterranean quickly, it was necessary to "endure". But where resistance would allowed gain

*Latin = repeating does good

of necessary time? Graziani felt the need of to give vent to his feelings with Mussolini and he sent to him a long report.

Put in evidence that the pause of the enemy was surely a prelude to the continuation of the offensive in order to eliminate Bardia and Tobruk and therefore to proceed with the conquest of all of Cyrenaica, he paused to outline the conditions of the two fortresses. Bardia was occupied from numerous forces: 62nd *Marmarica* Inf Div., nearly intact; 63rd *Cirene* Inf. Div., very tried and deprived of several antitank pieces; 1st CC.NN. *23 marzo* Div., reduced to approximately a quarter; 2nd CC.NN. *28 ottobre* Div., a little more than half; 64th *Catanzaro* Inf. Div., in still more precarious conditions; besides the frontier guard. But the perimeter belt, whose development was around on the some thirty of kilometers, was very little robust, especially in fact Anti-tank defense. What's more it was blocked by terrain, if not completely, and from the sea, where English ships calmly made target practice on the emplacements, casemates and depots. Tobruk was introduced still worse: a fortified town-walls insufficiently efficient, with a development of beyond 50 kilometers and a garrison limited to the 61st *Sirte* Inf. Div., the frontier guard and a few groups of artillery.

That premised and held account of the extreme difficulty to re-supply Bardia, were to ask that if it did not permit to try to clear this fortress, collecting all possible at Tobruk. Not as that could constitute a definitive solution:

"For this but I am not deceived to arrest the enemy offensive at the fortress of Tobruk; we will only succeed to make time, the most precious element, that it could allow to allow to flow suitable means to block further progresses. Bardia's fall is in fact foreseen that the adversary, repeating the same procedure - blockage of the port, interception of the communications and combined attack from the ground, the sea and the air - can smash some hole of the long fortified town-walls and to penetrate into the fortress. Nor, at present it is expected that our meager mobile forces, to combat enemy action in a manner which illusion be shattered.

The hard most bitter experience of these days makes us in fact conclude that, in this theater, a armored division is more powerful than an entire army. To the front to the armored vehicle the most firm and trained troops do not resist: the tank destroyer armament is not sufficient to stop their attack, especially if prepared by the massacring action of the aerial bombardment (...) ".

Consequently, Graziani continued, he was getting ready the organization

organization to defend the ridge of Derna, where he had already sent the Armored Brigade - two light tank battalions, two M 13 tank companies and two groups of artillery - which was to receive the new tank battalion M 13. Regardless though the strength of the location Derna-Berta-Mechili, was it likely that the British were pointing directly Benghazi-Soluch-Ajdabiya. This event had been given a certain tacking to the sector Agedabia-Gialo-Augila. In essence, a further influx of staff from Tripoli was useless. What was necessary was the shipment of suitable means to face the *Western Desert Force*: armored cars, tanks and antitank guns. If, as seemed, in Italy M 13 tanks existing already ready were the ones near the manufacturer, became never more urgent for their shipment to Libya, also without personal: they would have been assigned to the light tank battalions, that in such a way they would be employing a tank worthy of this name.

"However, the stakes- the salvation of Libya is such by asserting every effort in order to concentrate here what is necessary. The moment is serious and, for as much as can prove bitter, task that must be passed over to just boldness of other moments, resorting to the aid of the Germany.

If then we could have one or two armored divisions we would sure to make the enemy cross again the escarpment of Sollum. Where, but, was one entered in this order of ideas that above all is necessary: *timeliness*" ⁽¹¹³⁾.

The next day Graziani wrote also to Gen. Guzzoni, that on 29 November who had been named Undersecretary of State for war and Undersecretary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, repeating more or less how much had been told to Mussolini: there was not made many illusions, since Bardia was encircled, Tobruk would follow the same fate very shortly, the position of Derna-Mechili constituted *extremely rapidly* as so to speak and could be gone around totally from the south. And concluded:

"I have made present there all necessity. We are making & we will make all as here is possible to make for opposing the enemy that giving to you all the news that reaches us is decidedly oriented at arriving at the occupation of Libya. In this moment it is more and more prevailing to have at their disposition the most powerful aviation. I do not dramatize but I do not make harmful illusions. Only the shipment of powerful aerial & land means is estimated to prevent the enemy can still rescue

the situation" ⁽¹¹⁴⁾.

As stated Graziani responded objectively to reality. One observation seems reasonable to do: he held the position Derna-Mechili that, if the enemy had approached, to allow to play there "*the last card*" with any hope of success, but frankly it seems reasonable doubt on success of a field action.

In Rome there was tension. On 5 Decembers Gen. Ugo Cavallero having replaced Mar. in the office of chief of the General Staff and immediately rushed to Albania, where Gen. Soddu, from 9 November as new supreme commander in that place, he had reported a very delicate situation. At the same time Adm. Riccardi and Gen. Pricolo had were appointed secretaries of state and chiefs of staff respectively of the Royal Marina and R. Aeronautica in substitution of Adm. Cavagnari and of Gen. Valle. A few days later the appointment of Cavallero, Gen. Guzzoni asked the Army to a judgment on the situation and the possible developments. Roatta compiled a personal memorandum in which he put in evidence the impossibility from Italian part to break off the Mediterranean hinge of the British empire, the only way in his view was, to inflict a most serious blow to the adversary.

"It follows - Roatta wrote - the need *not from German aid* (which no one has ever asked, and no one intends to ask), but of a common action and *blockade* against said hinge.

It is - in other words - to replace to the current parallel actions, but distinct and distant, of Italy and Germany, a collective action in the theater of operations more profitable the effects of the common goal".

The examination of the three main interested theaters carried to the conclusion that they did not leave space to doubts on the above-mentioned necessity. In the Balkans Italy risked to be in a position not to resolving alone the game where the Greek forces had been increased with English or Turkish or Yugoslavia reinforces, that is to say that it is advised to study a combined Italian-German action. The Levant showed, for the moment, calm, but nothing induced to think that tomorrow it would not make common cause with Great Britain; in any case it was lend to a participation in order to head from the east for the Suez Canal. Evidently an initiative of the sort would have involves to not easy political premises, which the Turkish acquiescence and

soviet approval and introduced imposing logistic difficulties, however he appeared deserving of attention on the basis of the good outcome of the fight in Balcania. In the Aegean, the Italian forces did not represent a determining element in the conflict: they could simply disturb the enemy from sea and air, and resist for a certain time if attacked. How, then, to North Africa, could the most recent events, any could be the next epilogue, removed if not opposite to our decisive offensive possibilities. As for the English major armored unit it was necessary contrast with the same powerful unit, that we did not possess. It was proposed therefore, also in those theaters, a joint action, which would but not have offered the certainty to lead to the conquest of Alexandria and the Delta. Moreover our situation would have been singularly complicated if the French North African forces had joined to the movement of De Gaulle. On the sea, finally, a combined action for unavailability of German surface ships did not seem possible initially; for against the thing it above all appeared possible and advisable for the underwater forces and for those aerial against the *Mediterranean Fleet* and its bases and in massive cooperation with the land operations.

In conclusion, according to Roatta:

"A. It is not judged probable of being able to crush the enemy n. 1, Great Britain, striking him in the Mother land. It is judged instead possible choke it off by breaking the hinge of its Mediterranean empire.

B. Since the opponent concentrates in correspondence a great part of his forces, Italy is not in condition alone to perform - this task.

C. Consequently it is necessary of perform in common, replacing to the current parallel actions, but distinguished and distant, with a joint action aiming to the aforesaid goal.

D. Such action should be implemented in the Balkans to the Levant. It would have to be placed side by side from collective measures, to only realize in case of necessity, for metropolitan France.

E. Preconditioned to said action would have to be:

- Understanding intimate, clear and constant from the politico
- Military;
- Direction virtually unique in the sense of preparing and conducting operations in perfect agreement of the individual forces, fall within the framework of collective action;
- Pooling of materials, it is not acceptable that one fight with inadequate means, while the other

supplies modern arms to third parties, not entirely trusted.

F. Not dealing with, in all this, for *aid*, but simply of *concentration of efforts* in the naturally more vulnerable theater of operations for the Axis, in which the adversary can more effectively be hit, and where - taken into account of that - he concentrates his forces " (115).

The task for which he was moving it was entirely reasonable, and that is to say that the British Empire would have been mortally hit in Egypt, is clearly disputable. Of all the debatable part there are the concrete possibilities for the Axis in the Levant. However it deserves reference is the implied criticism of the initial strategic conception is the transparent failure of the "parallel war". Truly Roatta had spoken about "*virtually*" the only direction of the war more than "only direction" on the basis of clear political-military agreements, but it was "fit" to avoid offending the susceptibilities of the Comando Supremo and, above all, in the Supreme Commander

Neither the reference to the difficulties of Roatta overall Italian seemed misplaced. The organic situation in mid-December was in fact the following:

- a. In Italy: 42 divisions, of which:
 - complete: 3 Quick. Div. and 1 Motorized.;
 - nearly complete: 3 Inf. Div. truck-borne (lacking in truck group) and 1 Alpine Div. (some deficiency in the pack animals);
 - of varied efficiency: 1 Arm. Div. (with light tanks) and 22 Inf. Div.,
 - incomplete: 1 Arm. Div. and 10 Inf. Div.;
- b. In the Aegean: 1 Inf. Div. complete;
- c. In Albania: 10 Inf. Div 4 Alpine Div, 1 Mot. Div. (only a part) and 1 Arm. Div.;
- d. In Libya: 9 Inf. Div and 3 Militia Div.

In total, therefore, 71 divisions of which only five were complete. Of those in North Africa of known consistency, for major unit in Albania the situation was still worse. In part that is necessary to keep in mind the confusion of the army already provoked to from the planned dismissal of 600,000 men discharged by Mussolini in October ⁽¹¹⁶⁾ and the organic one for the painfully shabbiness of the binary division. In Addition that the equipments of army and the provisions were very under the requirements, however that had been calculated.

As far as Germany, it convene to leave the word of General

Marras:

"The impression produced in these environments as the military in the political loss of Sidi Barrani was profound,, because it is to occur soon after our retreat to Albania, which only now is here judged to be stabilizing (...).In official circles it is stated openly that "*the Italians have let themselves be surprised*", that "*the road of Sidi Barrani will now serve the English* " and wonders if it will be promptly executed a counter-offensive.

In the public are expressed appreciations little benevolent, also in regard to the fighting troops (...)" ⁽¹¹⁷⁾

Gen. von Rintelen - returning to Rome on 10 December, after being called to Berlin by von Brauchitsch and reprimanded to for his pessimistic affirmations about the Italian situation in North Africa and the Mediterranean ⁽¹¹⁸⁾ - he was quick to inform the OKW of the offensive by O'Connor, adding that the four divisions of Bardia were having the weeks counted; that then would fall Tobruk and then even Benghazi; that, finally, the other four divisions of Tripolitania could not offer serious resistance without armored units. For the whole answer Keitel replied hardly that "*there were still many possibilities of defense*" ⁽¹¹⁹⁾, but the German official thought it was modifying because on the 18th Marras announced:

"The German High Command for its part had thought that the retreat in Albania and the loss of Sidi Barrani had to be considered as unpleasant events in the case of the Italian military prestige, but not modifying substantially the military situation of the Axis (...).Subsequently the English progresses in North Africa have not aroused any worry and put in evidence the necessity of giving to Italy some military assistance. This manifest assistance for now by means of the shipment already loaded in a group cargo plane and with the next shipment of an aerial Corp on six groups of three squadrons" ⁽¹²⁰⁾

Cavallero had been taken by the events in Albania. On the 18th was returning to Rome in order to report to Mussolini and to realize with the Chiefs of the G.S. of the military reinforcements to be sent to the Greek front. Made aware of the letters of Graziani, he sent him a message rather offhand, but with which to gave him *card bianco*:

"Duce (...) after reviewing the situation, while confirming his full

confidence in your work, he leaves to You how to judge your action, having present necessity to delay as much as possible a advancing enemy & wear him out. To this end will be able to extend helpful resistance at Bardia (...)" ⁽¹²¹⁾,

and he assured him of the urgent departure for Tripoli of all the M 13 tanks available "*by order of the Duce*" ⁽¹²²⁾. The next day, 19 December, received von Rintelen, to which he illustrated openly the seriousness of the Libyan events. Putting Tripoli in efficiency was not only prevailed as entrenched field in order to hinder an eventual French movement from Tunisia, but also urged the availability of one armored division which element of maneuver and counterattack against the English. Germany could give this aid, moreover, already offered previously? Moreover, held account of the major units that had been become disorganized in Albania and North Africa, could Germany herself assume the supply of war material for ten divisions? Von Rintelen promised to immediately forward the demand to Berlin. Also Guzzoni wanted to speak with the German military attaché and in the talk that also had the presence of Roatta (20 Decembers) renewed the reasoning of Cavallero strongly, emphasizing the opportunity of a German threat from Rumania towards eastern Macedonian, so as to dissuade the Greeks moving troops from that frontier towards the area of Vojussa and the Albanian shoreline; of the shipment of two, rather than one, armored divisions to Libya; of the supply of war material, complete with supplies and instructors, for ten divisions and five army corps.

Graziani was made current of all that from Cavallero, than he telegraphed it again, making reference the personal dispatch addressed to Guzzoni, and, at the same time specifying that within the month they would have been sent another two M 13 tank battalions (beyond that one already disembarked at Tripoli with the 10th Bersaglieres) for a total 80 tanks and a regiment of motorized artillery removed from the *Ariete* or the *Littorio*. While, therefore, loomed some hope on the table were two other sensitive issues. Mussolini felt the need to introduce to the public a acceptable version of the turn of events, therefore decided to ask: "*I wonder if it useful to send a report publishable & naturally truthful on the first phase of the battle going from 9-19, from Sidi Barrani to Bardia. I think it is necessary*". ⁽¹²³⁾ The form and implied wounded Graziani, who was now hypersensitive. Moreover, just

that day in a speech to the House of Commons Churchill had pointed out the superiority of forces of the 10th Army and to the insufficient combativeness of the Italian units during the battle. Followed tightly by the cited dispatch, therefore, arrived another trembling demand for a open refutation to the declarations of the English *Prime Minister* ⁽¹²⁴⁾. Graziani sent a long rather emphatic response ⁽¹²⁵⁾. Probably it would have been preferable a clam and detached narration of the facts. The appreciations could be omitted, also since the speech would have lead very far away.

The second argument was communicated to the Comando Supremo in very concise terms::

"I communicate that I have today relived the commander of the 10th Army His Excellency Berti who returns to Italy. The Command was assumed by his Excellency Tellera & therefore not ask nor wish substitution with others of His Excellency Berti. The functions of the Chief of the G.S. Armed Forces N.A. was assumed by Brigadier General Miele Alighiero. Following the report" ⁽¹²⁶⁾.

It was in the air for some time. The existing disagreements were added license in Italy (for illness and family reasons) of Berti on the eve of the English offensive, his slow return and the equally slow resumption of the Command of the 10th Army, and finally issues of Tobruk and Derna, very recent.

Resumption the responsibility for the army, under the circumstances, and that is to say the concentration around Bardia of the entire XXIII Corps, Berti had turned every attention to Tobruk, where on the evening of the 12th had moved the Command of the Army, and thought opportune to make the point visa vie the defensive consistency of the base. He listed all the negatives aspects: absence of the anti-tank pits for long sections, no depth of the defense, indisposition of sector artilleries and maneuver, nonexistence of a reserve worthy of this name (a single battalion with one battery of 20 mm.), etc. He also put in prominence that, because of the morphology of the land and wide gaps of the anti-tank defense, the perimeter belt had to make use of a uniform density nearly on all the fronts and that, considered the absence of a small rear and the sector amplitude of the fortress, reserves and the center had to be motorized. Consequently he advanced the demand for approximately 130 antitank pieces, six groups of artillery, a regiment of motorized infantry reinforced with antitank pieces and anti-aircraft and a hundred motor vehicles. He added the obvious necessity

of a strong participation of the aviation meaning that "*the greater the number of aircraft that the central authority can be made available, the greater the likelihood of resistance*" and, as if were not enough, suggested the opportunity of being able to arrange "*at least two divisions fully auto-portable and rich in anti-tank weapons*" in order to build a movement mass to operate dynamically outside the fortress. All "*if he wants that the fortress to accomplish the dispatch of the Duce (...) otherwise the resistance - in spite of the will and the value of the men - cannot be of long duration*". It is true that Berti held close the list of reinforcements needed "*penetrating, naturally, of the difficulties that are opposed to the integral realization of needs outlined above*" ⁽¹²⁷⁾, but the letter seems difficult to justify in every respect. The conditions in which Tobruk was found were most famous, therefore as the entity of the existing forces in Libya was known; moreover the defense of the fortress returned in a certain way to the competence of Berti having from his assumption of command, that is to say from the outbreak of hostilities. Hitting, for the record, the unfavorably hard superficially of the signal to Bardia, whose direct responsibility it was of the Commander of XXIII the Corps: "*I made an abstraction of fort of Bardia that by now, strengthened from the mobile troops of Gen. Bergonzoli, is in the best conditions in order to resist*", when surely not ignorant as to defensive structures Bardia was not much better and Tobruk as the "*mobile troops*" of the XXIII Corps were rather shaken and none *mobile*. To ask, therefore, those reinforces, and most importantly bring up two motorized divisions was, in those circumstances, just the last thing written to Graziani. No wonder they responded in kind:

"As for you, Your Excellency, you put so well in evidence in your 01/105999 of the 16th current of the cares of the necessities for the defense of the fortress of Tobruk as much exactly as a kind of example could be already calculated from the day in which the said fort was formed and I mean I think four or five years ago. But in the current moment lament for the deficiencies is the issue that can only serve at to put at place your personal responsibilities of the moment. Now that this I you have made not you remains that to hold present these conclusions: (...)" ⁽¹²⁸⁾.

SITUATION OF THE ARTILLERIES ON 12 DECEMBER TO THE EGYPTIAN FRONTIER							
Gun (1)	Tobruk		Bardia		Reserve Com.Sup	Maneuver Mass	
	Fortress	at disp. XXXIII Corp	Fortress	at disp. 10th Army	at Tobruk and Bardia	With the div's	XXIII Corps
149/35	16						
149/13					48		
120/25 (2)	12		16				
105/28	4				48	12	16
100/17		12			60	48	12
77/28	36		24				
75/46				28		4	
75/27	4		16		24	132	
75/27 C.K.						16	
65/17						56	8
47/32		8	24		16	74	16
20mm		32			16	96	32
Totals	72	52	80	28	212	450	80

Notes

(1) Excluding the guns of the coastal defense and the territorial air defense

(2) Of R. Marina

The conclusion, in essence, was to be held at any cost, and that therefore it was necessary to get busy. All right, except for one remark. Graziani evidently did not remember that at the end of July, in a memorandum on the organization of Libya sent to Badoglio, he had declared "*the two fortresses of Tobruk and port Bardia in full efficiency*" ⁽¹²⁹⁾. Berti hastened to complain that he had been misinterpreted and to assure his own absolute confidence in the Supreme Commander (!) and in the final success. Appeared to give a suggestion that, objective, it would have at least deserved serious attention:

"That is why I have proposed the question of whether, given the modest efficiency of the fort of Tobruk - Bardia having that has a satisfactory arrangement - does not convene to concentrate all the forces and all the means available, instead that to space out the forces in depth in order to try to arrest the enemy on successive lines of defense, that in this area are generally unsuitable and easy to go around.

I am decidedly for the first solution and that is why I have proposed the complete picture of the most pressing needs of the fort of Tobruk (...)" ⁽¹³⁰⁾

Except Graziani had other ideas on how to conduct the upcoming fight and was turning all the attention to the realization of a rear defensive organization, that would arrested or at least delay the English penetration in depth. It was based on three essentially static systems. The first was the notable Derna-Berta obstruction with a mobile wing at Mechili, entrusted initially to Gen. Della Bona, commander of the 60th *Sabratha* Inf. Div., and subsequently to Gen. Cona, commander of the XX Corps, called in from Tripolitania. Then a series of fixed and mobile units in the area of Barce in order to arrest infiltrations in the *gebel*, entrusted to Col. Piatti. Finally, the cover of Benghazi. Graziani asserted to know the natural weakness of the Derna-Berta-Mechili position and made no excessive illusions on the real possibilities of resistance of the miniscule garrison of the area of Barce and the Benghazi sector ⁽¹³¹⁾: some of the organization he ordered for reason of "hope". Reason to doubt his assertion, but just for this there is to ask if it would had not have been preferable to concentrate on Tobruk the maximum of the effort rather than to complete a maneuver that was not either a delaying action nor a withdraw (indeed difficult to conduct without motorized troops) The fact is that under this conception, Graziani gave

new directives. In it they confirmed the order of resistance to the bitter end of Tobruk and Bardia, fixed the criteria on which to set up the defense on the embankment of Derna and pointed out to cover Benghazi as well as the occupation of the crossroads for Marada. At the same time, with the goal to better attend with provisions, he ordered the movement of the Army Command to the village Luigi di Savoia (east of Cirene), leaving at Tobruk Gen. Pitassi Mannella, commander of the XXII Army Corps. The further objections raised by Berti he decided were the exception and the 10th Army was entrusted to Gen. Tellera, Chief of General Staff of the Comando Superiore and therefore well current with the situation.

"When the victory of Sidi Barrani was safe, that is to say on 12 December, Gen. Wavell on his own initiative made a wise and daring decision" ⁽¹³²⁾, as Churchill said afterwards sending the 4th Indian Division to Sudan. In reality things were not quite that way. Wavell had established to send the division to reinforce Gen. William Platt before of the beginning of operation *Compass* and Churchill on 13 December, once informed of the Victory of Sidi el-Barrani, sped up an immediate and vigorous exploitation of the success. Naturally - he wrote the pursuit would have held the first place in the thoughts of the Commander in Chief; additionally nothing would have more shaken Mussolini of a disaster in Libya. And without doubt it would have been very soon reached some port in Italian territory for they do flowing via sea the reinforcements and continuing the pursuit until when they had been met with *"true resistance"* ⁽¹³³⁾. And on the 16th insisted: *"they are convinced that only when you abandon to the main hope for turning them will be sure not to be more able to continue to secondary actions in the Sudan or in the Dodecanese"* ⁽¹³⁴⁾. But Wavell was sure that without the availability of the port of Tobruk not more than two divisions could have operated in Libya and that the best reinforcement to the 5th Indian Division in the Sudan - important for the battle for the Red Sea - would have been another well trained Indian Division.

All in all the subsequent events can be considered to favor of the thoughts of Wavell. With the judgment that he could be observed perhaps that the permanence of the 4th Indian in North Africa would have impressed a such force to the push towards the West to allow the attainment of Tripoli before the arrival of the *Africa Korps*. However this is in the field of conjectures and however it was very difficult to imagine the debacle that was to fall on

the Italian 10th Army. Meanwhile, given the obvious convenience of not give respite to the troops of Berti, it was decided the pounding from the sea and the sky by way of softening and psychological pressure. From the 14th to 19th bombers of the *Western Desert Air Force* concentrated their attack on Bardia, from the 18th to the 22nd those based in Malta struck the Cyrenaica airfields of Castel Benito, Benina and Berka. The result was the acquisition of a sensitive and concrete aerial advantage ⁽¹³⁵⁾, while on the sea the two gunboats *Terror* and *Aphis* closely cannonaded unmolested the harbor defense and infrastructures and the magazines that were close to the coast. The evening of 18th O'Connor persuaded that the garrisons of Bardia and Tobruk meant to resist in place: he proceeded, therefore, to begin to eliminate the first one of them. But first of all it was necessary to develop the solution already adopted for the initial logistic problem.

The concept was simple: two engaged major unit had to be supported by two field depots forward constituted and fed under the care of the Command of the *Western Desert Force*. When the distance between the attacking troops and the logistic bases became excessive because of the vicissitudes of combat the two new field depots were increased in capacity to that of divisions, while the previous ones, by now outdated, were used to exhaustion by various units in transit. Naturally more the attack progressed greater became the burden of the transports of higher order. However always two field depots in service and, from time to time, two were to exhaustion. Therefore, on the enemy march and approach had been allowed from depot n. 1, fifteen or so kilometers to southeast of Maatan Baggush, and n. 2 at Marsa Matruh; the battle of Sidi el-Barrani from depot n. 3, roughly half way between Marsa Matruh and Maktila, and n. 4, at a score of kilometers to the north-west of Bir Kenays. While the 4th Indian Division was concentrated at Sidi el-Barrani there had been constituted field depot n. 5 to east of Bir er-Rabia but, turned out very soon much too rearward, a new depot had become necessary, n. 6, on the road halfway between Sofafi and the frontier and at the same time was prepared n. 7 at Sidi el-Barrani. Now they were in course on preparation depot n. 8 at Sollum for the 6th Australian Division and n. 9 at Fort Capuzzo for the 7th Armored Division. As it has been said, the transport companies had an onerous task. They had captured eighty Italian heavy trucks in good conditions, another fifty, of greater tonnage, arrived on 15 December from Palestine, but the usury of means was strong and the difficulty of the repairs so strongest,

analogous to how it happened on the Italian side, the unserviceable motor vehicles by now reached nearly 40% of the organic. The occupation of the small port of Sollum (16 Decembers) allowed to alleviate the burden of the supplying via the roadway. As far as water, towards the end of the month the sources of Sidi el-Barrani and Bug Bug were returned to efficiency and the tanks of Fort Capuzzo were maintained at full by water sent from Sollum.

On 21 December Gen. Mackay assumed the command of the Sollum-Bardia area. With the already existing air photographs of that time allowed a precise enough picture of the defense, but an intense work of recon patrols completed the information. A week later Mackay thought of being able to conclude the attack plan and he fixed the beginning for 05:30 of 2 January, then postponed it for 24 hours in order to complete the stock piling of ammunitions. Also knowing that in Bardia there were elements of five divisions, strangely he estimated the total of such forces not more than 10,000 men and 100 guns ⁽¹³⁶⁾: Against them he meant to move with the 6th Australian Division, the support group of the 7th Armored Division, the 7th Tank Regiment and other support units. The English 16th Brigade was not to be committed (sketch n. 14).

Already it has been spoken about the defensive order of Bardia. At the beginning of - hostilities the organization had reached a stage that conferred to them a character of a little more than fieldworks and turned out only armed in part: it lacked, in particular, the antitank obstacle and the armament was almost nonexistent. Six later weeks, in tune with the assumed favorable course from the conflict, the fortification work was quietly suspended, leaving in action only those ones relative to the logistical equipment, consisting essentially in the construction and of the repair of roads, tracks and water works. On 1 December the fortress was garrisoned by approximately 2,500 men of the frontier guard. Numerous field and antitank artillery had been but removed from the emplacements and sent in reinforcement to the major units operating with the 10th Army in Egyptian territory. To that time the coastal defense had a battery of 120 mm. of the R. Marina and the anti-air defense consisted of two batteries of 75/27. At the beginning of the British offensive the "fortress" was in short a simple entrenched field, whose perimeter introduced a discontinuous wire, a incomplete anti-tank pit, a few and intervals of mined fields. The sections to north and south of Bardia, adjacent to the coast were furrowed by numerous *uidian (wadi)* therefore they were naturally stronger.

Schizzo n. 14

The map illustrates the military situation around Bardia, Libya, during the Battle of Bardia. Key features include:

- Geographical Features:** The Mediterranean Sea is on the right. The city of Bardia is located on the coast. Other locations include Atiga, Brahim, Scedella, Gu Rim, Garid.a, Scemas, Br. Regim, Zaula, Sgula, Raddoppio, Maatrea, and Sidi Hasan.
- Military Units and Positions:**
 - Italian units are marked with 'C.N.' (Carabinieri) and 'AU' (Armata Unita). Specific units include 233, 249, 231, 230, 21, 62, 48, 146, 123, and 17.
 - German units are marked with 'XX' (Panzer). Specific units include 21, 62, 48, 146, 123, and 17.
- Operations and Movements:**
 - Arrows indicate the direction of attacks and movements. Key movements are labeled: 'sera del 4', '4 Genn. ore 16', '4 Genn. ore 5.30', 'sera del 3', and 'RADDOPPIO'.
 - The map shows the 'SETTORE C.A.B.' and 'SETTORE M.R.C.' sectors.
- Infrastructure:** The map shows various roads and railways, including the 'Schedella' and 'Gu Rim' roads.

When Bergonzoli rallied in Bardia the picture did not appear, therefore, very bright, but not only on the terms of the preparations defensives. *"In the fortress we find great disorder: motor vehicles of every type abandoned everywhere; theories about stragglers, for the greater part pertaining to the overwhelmed Libyan divisions and elements of the "Catanzaro" division destroyed at Samalus, besides a part of the "3 gennaio" that it has not made time to re-enter to just the that has not had time to return to his unit. All are going around without point of reference, with faces impressed with signs of the sufferings of long days of uneasiness, of hard work and of starving, still stunned and shaken from the devastating fury of battle, that had devoured their units"* wrote an officer of the Command of the XXIII Army Corps ⁽¹³⁷⁾. Also the logistical situation left much to be desired, well that in official documents it had always been described as largely adequate, in fact that already in the middle of December turned out poor: missing the lubricant for the automatic arms, the fuel availability was limited to the point to reduce to various indispensable services and to resort to the transport by hand, the antitank munitions was reduced very little, the sanitary material and medicinal equipments were almost insubstantial. As far as the provisioning and to the clothing - equipment, the English bombing had heavy affected their consistency destroying tens of thousands of tins of meat, great quantities of flour of various kinds and, as well as many kinds of equipment. The arrival of two motor-sail boats the only supplies to reach Bardia from its investment to its fall - with a cargo of flour and tins served very little, so that Bergonzoli halved the food rations.

The fortified camp of Bardia was shaped like a bean leaning against the sea for approximately 18 kilometers. The front, on the ground - a some thirty of kilometers - watched the desert with eleven strong points and sea with another three (one to the far north and two to the far south), all of the frontier guard. In second line only a single strong point in the southern section of the front existed. Behind the frontier guard the battalions of the divisions were located, naturally on foot. In reserve, theoretical, the 28 *ottobre* CC.NN. Division. The was deployed in three articulated area. The coastal, called Mrega, interdicting the origins to east of the Sollum - Bardia roadway. All in all it was the stronger, in addition, to part the two strong points to the sea (Maatred and Tut u-Faham), defended the convexity of the entrenched camp with three strong points (Souta and Sidi Hasa, plus one behind the switchback) and the 157th and 158th regiments of the 63rd *Cirene* Division.

The central sector, Portcullis, reached an amplitude of a ten of kilometers and directly blocked the Sollum - Bardia road, but such tactical indication was more rather relative being the flat desert land that was spread in front of the four strong points (Garidia, Shemmas, Bir Regima and Zauia), all reinforced by guns of 65 mm. and 47 mm. of the 115th and 116th Regiments of the 62nd *Marmarica* Division. To north the Garfan area blocked the Tobruk-Bardia roadway and originates from the north-west with three strong points (Shegeila, Sidi Ibrahim and Atiga) and it was anchored on the sea with a fourth strong point (Raheb) also not garrisoned. To the rear were the 219th and 233rd Legions of the 23 *marzo* CC.NN. Division.

The ITALIAN FORCES ENGAGED In the BARDIA DEFENSE

XXIII army corps Command	1st 23 <i>March</i> .cc.nn. Div.
62nd <i>Marmarica</i> Inf. Div.	219th cc.nn. legion
115th infantry	233rd cc.nn. legion
116th infantry	201st artillery (less a bty.)
44th artillery	LXI L tank battalion (rests)
LXIII mtr. battalion	services unit
LXIII tank battalion	2nd 28 <i>October</i> cc.nn. Div.
LXIII engineer battalion	231st cc.nn. legion
services unit	238th cc.nn. legion
63rd <i>Cirene</i> Inf. Div.	202nd artillery (a few elements)
157th infantry	XX L tank battalion (rests)
158th infantry	services unit
45th artillery	frontier Guard
LXIII mtr. battalion	unit of infantry and artillery
services unit	Troops of the army corps
64th <i>Catanzaro</i> Inf. Div.	21st artillery grouping
(Nominal recovered elements was shared	I/10th army corps artillery
between the strong points of the frontier	one company M13 tanks
guard)	smaller units
	services unit

Immediately he gave hand in the work necessary to increase the efficiency of the perimeter line, in order least one set of second-order stations, to implement a certain number of mines lying in the stores, in order to clear the modest sand anti-tank ditch, completely filled with sand, to tidy up the fence in many places devastated. He also proceeded also to the organization

of the connections and the observation, to the constitution of some mobile reserves and to the rearrangement of the services. Moreover, because of the lack of means and limited time available the result could not be but modest: they were collecting in far fields and transported by shoulder stones being necessary for the construction of walls in the emplacements of the second order; strip of mines completed in front of the wire had such insufficient density from being able to be removed with facility and it did not give guarantees against an attack of medium tanks; the work of emptying of the anti-tank ditch, carried out with the few tools available, nearly was cancelled by the wind that brought back into the pit the little sand cleared; the wire, repair and deficient of stakes, fortifying against nocturnal surprise on part of infantry elements, but it could not constitute an impediment for tanks; the preparation of incendiary bombs (hand bombs by filling bottles with benzene) was slowed down from the insufficient confidence that the rudimentary device inspired and that, in effects, gave much limited antitank contribution to the fight. An emergency landing field was prepared within the town-walls in substitution of those existing on the outside, by now much too subject to the enemy attack. For the coastal defense and antiaircraft the increase was modest: a twin 120 mm. mounting for the first and two 40 mm. guns of the R. Marina and some *Schwarzlose* machine-guns for the second one.

To this point helps to see the situation as it was considered in Rome, in Cirene and in Cairo.

According to an internal memorandum compiled from the operations section II (overseas) of the General Staff of the R. Esercito dated 26 December, the blockage of Bardia introduced three alternatives. The first obviously consisted in the passive resistance to the siege. In such case English would have awaited the exhaustion of the defenders or, when they had collected troops sure to overwhelm, attempt an action of force. The first or the later, in any case, the fall of the fortress was unavoidable. The second solution: sortie of the garrison via ground or its evacuation via sea. In the first case it would have to deal with the same risks to which had agreed to escape being fixed in the fortress, that is to say movement of units substantially dismounted, undermined by the action of armor with the danger to have the fate of the 64th *Catanzaro*. In the second to case it would have been necessary the absolute dominion of the sea and huge naval means available for transport: hence, no to be talked about.

The third solution translated into a counter-offensive aiming to

to unblock Bardia. This being the alternative that was agreed to examine last. The analysis of the contra-opposed forces was based on one side on the information of the S.I.M. and on the situation from the first of December modified from the news arriving from the Comando Superiore of Libya.

In the aerial arena the English seemed to have 500 aircraft against 300 Italians. Considering those present in the theater of operations (to same way as all of the forces of Egypt) the Italian units located in Sicily and those of Germany (250 airplane) that were flowing in, were thought to be able shortly arrive at parity in the entire theatre and local superiority "*when and where we want*".

In the ground area it was assessed the presence or the arrival en route in Marmarica of eight infantry divisions and two Armored of the enemy. Major units located in the region of the Delta could not have reached the border if not after several months because of the logistic difficulties, therefore for the moment they did not give worry. To the troops already sheltered or next to Bardia could be opposed seven infantry divisions (of which five in Bardia, including the 64th *Catanzaro* and the frontier guard), seven light tank battalions and two medium tank battalions. Adding to these the V M.13 Tank Battalion, already at Tripoli, the imminent departure from Italy of two light tank battalions prepared for the 5th Army, and the foreseen delivery of the VI M.13 Tank Battalion and thirty-six tanks without crew, could be considered available in Cyrenaica for the first of January 350 light tanks and 170-180 medium tanks. That being the case, or rather the figures in the table, followed that in the short term, with no provision for exceptions, you could achieve on the battlefield numerical parity if not quality of armor, that the main element.

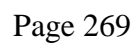
" Ultimately - the document said - taking into account:

1. for the aerial superiority that we could realize at the opportune moment;
2. for the best number of our artillery, which could hardly be achieved by the British;
3. our organization's environmental warfare, in preparation for years and already under way for several months;
4. for our better logistic situation, in consequence of the smaller distance from the bases;
5. for the moral and technical superiority of our infantry units

homogenous and in part accustomed to combat, of forefront to those adversaries of varied origin and for newest to the fight, it can be thought that the engagement would be faced, on the whole, in condition of parity".

Next consider the fact, sending to North Africa also the medium tank battalion "currently inactive in Albania", the *Ariete* Armored Division with 200 light tanks and eventually, in due time, the *Trento* Motorized Division, as well as all the existing antitank arms in the motherland, was believed to give a few to Graziani "*within the first fortnight of January or beyond*" the possibility to unblock Bardia, if it held, with a brilliant operation re-supplying the fortress with provisions via aircraft. If Bardia had been overwhelmed in the meantime, however after to have worn away an equivalent at least number of an English major unit, Graziani could have counter maneuver with the minimal result to maintain to the possession of the greater part of Cyrenaica and a maximum strike to the body of the British army and not only regain the lost territory but the lost prestige. Finally, in the worse one of the hypotheses, in case that is to say time was short, would have made sure at least the possession of Tripolitania, also remembering the uncertainty of French North Africa, as well as how much more serious had been our greater misfortunes.

It cannot be agreed on similar document, to whose origin, moreover, was wrong or incomplete information. The S.I.M. indicated astride of the frontier and in Marmarica at least three infantry divisions and two armored and to east of the Halfaya pass, in arrival, another four divisions (sketch n. 15): decidedly too many regarding the existing forces essentially (7th Armored Division, 6th Australian and 4th Indian, of which he was reasonable ignored of the departure, and the *Selby Force*) in addition to the garrison of Marsa Matruh and the incomplete New Zealand division, even more distant. However, even if such a reconstruction, even if the fictional relationship of equality in terms of large infantry units amazes unwarranted optimism about the viability and success of a great operating maneuver design. But where more reason is had than to refuse the memorandum is in the technical appreciation of the problem. To boast the greater number of artillery knowing the ancientness, the inadequacy and the insufficient of range; to boast the best environmental war organization in action for months knowing the insufficiency of the Cyrenaican port facilities, the deficit situation of the automotive repairs,



the burning issue of the road transports; to boast the "*moral and technical superiority*" of our units of infantry knowing the most recent events of Sidi el-Barrani and the level of efficiency of the divisions of Bardia; to boast aerial superiority knowing from the reports of Graziani which turned out instead to note clear dissatisfaction of the ground Commands; to think sufficient to also to reach numerical parity of tanks knowing by now from the memorandum the heavy qualitative difference and after to have touched with hand the operating weight of the *Matilda*; well, all that is frankly unacceptable. However the study reached Guzzoni on 8 January and it annotated: "*it seems to Me that there is not anything more to do*". By now he dealing with the goal to attempt to give oxygen to Graziani in waiting for the Germans.

In Cirene Graziani he decided to limit himself to intensifying the defensive provisions underway until the arrival from Italy of reinforcements that it would allow him to resume the initiative of the operations. On 1 January, he pointed out again to the Chief of the General Staff the situation, which he considered serious despite some breathing space granted by the momentary operational stasis. He reiterated the concepts already exposed the detailed report direct to Mussolini on December 17 and, in particular, illustrated the conditions in which the two "fortresses" were found and the Derna-Berta-Mechili deployment. Bardia had sufficient forces to counter an attack but not the means to do things operated outside, therefore it was destined to fall, if not utter for exhaustion, more or less of long expiration. Tobruk, very weakly garrisoned, had succeeded to form small quick columns in order to contrast the exploring activity enemy, but these unit formations, among other things of insufficient effectiveness and of limited range, had ended with embezzling means of fire already in reduced availability of the base. The Derna-Berta-Mechili deployment had meager forces with limited mobility, so there was little hope of stopping the operation, supported in the area of barrier or robust pin, the eventual English penetration towards the Cyrenaican *gebel* and the plain of Benghazi. They followed news on the most recent adopted provisions. The Armored Brigade, equipped with only 25 efficient M.13 tanks was located at Mechili with advanced units at Ain el Gazala and Tmimi: its possibilities did not allow a mistake against an attack with mass of armored units. Small garrisons, fixed and mobile, were placed in points of obliged passage of the *gebel* and to the outlets of the Benghazi plain. The defense of Agedabia and Marada

on the coastal strip (el-Agheila and more to the west) had been strengthened.

Finally the shipment to Ain el-Gazala of the 10th Bersaglieres and the V Tank Battalion (M) had been arranged in order to contrast a possible attack in forces to the rear of Tobruk. This decision, that deprived the Comando Superiore of their only valid reserves, was considered necessary in order to prevent the cutting of the communications between Derna and Tobruk and, above all, an incursion on the Tmimi and airfields more forward than Ain el-Gazala. The lack of armored troops plagued Graziani strongly, which he thought opportune to get his hands on: persisting such inferiority, once lost Bardia and Tobruk - and with them 70,000 men and 700 gun - the salvation of the Libya would be remained entrusted to the few units of the Derna-Mechili line ⁽¹³⁸⁾.

We now need to look more closely at the armored and air forces. On the figures relative to the tanks - as well as to aircraft - a remarkable oscillations exist, depending of the fact that sometimes are reported to means in organic, at times to those really existing and sometimes, finally, to those serviceable at the date considered. For the light tanks, then, the news is still more confused and conflicting, it is because a lot appreciated as war instrument is not because often the availability of some units was therefore paltry to induce to employ promiscuously the serviceable tanks. After the battle of Sidi el-Barrani ⁽¹³⁹⁾ the situation was the following. In Bardia they found one company of the III/32nd tank with 13 M.13 tanks, the LXIII Battalion of light tanks of the 62nd *Marmarica* Inf. Div. with 23 serviceable tanks and ten in good conditions, the remainder of the XX Battalion of light tanks (already assigned to the 64th *Catanzaro* Inf. Div.) and the LXI Battalion of light tanks (already assigned to the 23 *marzo* CC.NN. Div). In Tobruk were found the I/4th tank with 40 M.11 tanks, of which five at Ain el-Gazala and other unserviceable, as well as the XXI and LXIII Light Tank Battalions with 32 serviceable tanks ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾. At Mechili the Armored Brigade with the III/32nd tank (less one company) with 24 M.13 tanks ⁽¹⁴¹⁾ and the LX Light Tank Battalion with 28 tanks, of which a good half were unserviceable. In Benghazi, finally, the new V/32nd Tank with 37 M.13 tanks. The issue of repairs was, looked at as a, very large problem. Regret to say that unfortunately was aggravated by problems that could have been avoided and due. As an example, on 25 December the deputy superintendent in Tripoli telegraphed that spare parts for tanks M.11 and M.13 were in the bottom of the hold of the ship *Castelverde* -who had to go to Benghazi -and therefore

it was impossible to discharge. To Gen. Giordano, the superintendent replied to immediately to unload all the material in Tripoli and to forward the replacement parts, to Derna.

Even in terms of aviation it was not much to look at. Naturally the points of views were quite divergent. The commanders of major unit of the army complained the insufficient direct contribution received from the sky and for against heavy and nearly constant presence of the *Royal Air Force*. Also they signaled the large amounts of military equipment abandoned on the advanced fields. The Commander of the 5th Air Fleet, for his part, deplored the too much the impromptu withdraw orders. At the fall of Sidi el-Barrani, the 5th Fleet had still maintained it the forward deployment to the west of Tobruk, except that the retreat of Bardia forced to fall back precipitously fields Gazebut, Ben Amed and el-Adem by now much too exposed. The bulk of the formations then back on the fields of the area between Ain el-Gazala and Derna, however, in this way, the distance between bases and objectives to defend (Bardia and Giarabub) or worse still to strike became sensitive. The damage that the aerial units were enduring were strong: efficient of enemy air defense, numerical and qualitative superiority of the English fighters, bombing day and night on the overcrowded camps of Cyrenaica now easier to reach, were all elements that affected greatly on the performance of the Fleet. Even the difficulty of finding the bases of the *Western Desert Air Force* and especially the inefficiency of the incursions of our bombers, the position of said bases was used only as point of support and therefore for short time, contributed to reduce the result of the Italian action. Just in relation to the smallness of the targets offers to the interventions of the 5th Fleet, Gen. Porro thought convenient to assume a defensive or eventually return to a more offensive attitude. Therefore, in his view, was the case of worrying about keeping up a good amount of fighters units, rather than of bombers, for the defense of the locality and the reaction to incursions, short-range reconnaissance, no longer can send SM.79 let alone Ro.37 or Ca.310 given the strong number of *Hurricane* and *Spitfire* appeared on the front and existing on the enemy forward fields, which were demonstrating *ad abundantiam** their technical superiority. In awaiting his ground reinforcements was considering "*the dangerous and useless to send further shares of reconnaissance or bombers to Cyrenaica, since they would increase to the number of the aircraft mired in the battlefields and the target for the English aircraft*" ⁽¹⁴²⁾.

Latin = "To abundance."(1) To a great degree; in great measure.(2) For the purpose of showing a great profusion

On 21 December Gen. Porro, in a personal letter to Pricolo, confessed:

"(...) Now, however, the situation has unfortunately turned upside down. There can be no illusion more about the possibilities of our action. Numerous *Spitfire* and *Hurricane*, many English bomber units; therefore continuous attacks on the fields, attack on our aircraft in nearly every action. Life becomes increasingly difficult and harsh and losses increase. Castel Benito is under attack from Malta; Benghazi under aerial attack that with a short journey from Heraklion. After the first most glorious and shining days, alive now the tragedy of the impotence for the difficulties of the fields, connections, refueling, repairs, the work on the ground and in flight and for the flooding of the fields that immobilizes us and makes us bogged down. You can be sure that we do everything can to hold on, but it will not be successful until when we stabilize our forward positions so as to allow the re-occupation of some abandoned field, especially El Adem and vicinity, the employment possibilities will always be precarious and reduced (...)" ⁽¹⁴³⁾.

Pricolo sent the letter to Guzzoni emphasizing that many the issues of the aircraft was not the most pressing, but the strong deficiency of the bases and the partial flooding of those existing. And he commented that unfortunately in the last few days we were due to leave ten airports operating in the area of Tobruk and that "*in the current precarious situation has contributed much in the precipitation, under every excessive aspect, with which the Comando Superiore has ordered the evacuation*", the logical consequence of the initial plan of Graziani was that "*foresaw the quick abandonment of Cyrenaica*". This accusation, in itself, seems questionable, however, the disconnect between the 10th Army and 5th Fleet clearly demonstrates the absence of a inter-forces formulation of the battle.

The commander of the British XIII Corps, as from January the *Western Desert Force* was called ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾, did not have any doubts. Of all the forces available to the frontier (see table on the following page) the part of protagonist for the breach of the defensive walls of Bardia and the penetration of the fortress was given to the 6th Australian Division and the 7th *Royal Tanks*, that remained with just 26 serviceable *Matilda*. The other troops served in order to allow and to control the blockage of the base. The 6th Australian Division was first major unit sent overseas from far Australia. Trained in Palestine, where was formed the 19th brigade, itself was still absent in some divisional troops, but it was be a matter of the most solid unit as for personnel, organization and training.

The British Forces Employed
In the ATTACK on BARDIA

Supposed by the S.I.M.	in Reality
7th armored division 7th Arm. division bis 6th Australian division 4th Indian division 2nd New Zealand division units imprecise 16th British brigade	XIII army corps with: 7th armored division: 11th Hussars 4th armored brigade 7th armored brigade support Group divisional units and reinforcements 6th Australian division 16th infantry brigade 17th infantry brigade 19th infantry brigade 6th cavalry 1st field artillery 2nd field artillery 3rd field artillery minor divisional units I btg. Royal Northumberland Fusiliers 7th Royal Tanks 104th horse artillery 51st field artillery 64th Heavy artillery 16th British infantry brigade Army Corps Support

Note:

Wavell indicated, referring to *only the shock troops* - and that is to say the 6th Australian Division reinforced - a total force of 20,000 men, 122 gun and 26 heavy tanks. Evidently did not consider the light tanks of the 6th Australian Cavalry or those used by the 7th Armored Division. As far as artillery, the organic units would present 152 field pieces , 34 heavy field, a hundred of antitank pieces and an imprecise number of antiaircraft guns (5 light and 6 heavy batteries).

The success of the plan was based on the definition of the breach of the front and on the strong exploitation by the *Matilda*. For the first point the convenience to apply the effort in the central field was obvious enough since it was thought that Bergonzoli attended the action astride of the roadway for Fort Capuzzo, the choice fell on the section some kilometer to the south of the roadway for Tobruk, just to the height of Bardia, also because it had been characterized the limit between the defensives fields of Gerfan and Ponticelli. In such a way the attack would have had, presumably, the advantage of the surprise and the softness of the invested section. On the issue of the tanks, O'Connor took part to suggest to Mackay to change the tactic followed at Nibeua. While there in the tanks were able to break-in without fear because of the absence of adequate anti-tank defense, at Bardia for good or bad: was something of an anti-tank pit and a mine field. Therefore the infantry had to precede the tanks in order to constitute a bridgehead to clear the obstacles. It had been supplied also with other necessities. From Cairo were flown 11,500 leather jackets without sleeves in order to protect the men from the intense nocturnal cold. From the battlefield of Sidi el-Barrani they had been sent 300 pairs of gloves and 350 captured wire cutting pliers. From the rears they were in arrival 10,000 meters of white ribbon in order to mark crosses and the corridors in the mined fields. After all O' Connor could presume to have thought of everything.

Between 31 December and 2 January the *Royal Air Force* bombed practically the entire area to north of the road for Tobruk and the defensive wall. The two British gunboats carried out a bombardment. The *softening* of the positions and infrastructures was violent and the result, seem, sensitive are on the plan of the damages are on that of the moral. The design of Mackay was rather simple. The shock troops of the main attack (16th brigade with the 7th *Tanks* and, in second line, the newly arrived 19th brigade) had to overcome the anti-tank ditch, the wire and the mine field and aim a shot straight at Bardia, directing in time the battalions of the wing to the right and left of the breach in order taking in the rear the nearby strong points and make it impossible to suture the tear in the defense system. Then after the 19th brigade had to penetrate in its turn and to spread towards south-east. The combined fire was given from 96 pieces of artillery. On the southern front the 17th brigade, supported by 24 **boc** of fire, had to perform a secondary action intended mainly to distract the attention of defenders. To the north 40 pieces of the support group of the 7th Armored Division would have engage

engaged the northern field, while the 6th *Royal Tanks* would have tested the defense with demonstrative actions, holding itself ready to take part were possible.

At 04:30 the 3 pioneers and the 2/1st Australian battalion ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ occupied the line of departure. From a distance, they felt the bombing by formations of the *Royal Air Force* and saw flames and smoke rise from Bardia. An hour later he began preparing an artillery attack on the front, an area of 2500 X 500 meters, and the pioneers approached the obstacles. While some hurried to dull the walls of the Anti-tank ditch, seven groups of mines clearer were brought forward with the *bengalore* tubes. It was not difficult to open the corridors and then charge across it: the Italian fire reaction was minimal. It is strange, but to as it turns out from the report introduced subsequently from the commander of the artillery of the fortress, "*no demand for obstruction fire was forwarded from the forward strong points*". Perhaps the only reasonable explanation to the facility with which the engineers operated seems to reside in the excessive distance existing between the obstacles and the strong points, that distance evidently prevented it or made it difficult to monitor and the control of the obstacles in issue ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾. This would explain how, towards 07:00, the defenders had been seen to lean of the arrival of the *Matilda* more or less at the same time as the Australian infantry, had space to form a small bridgehead over obstacles and to let the tanks now free to enter the heart.

The first Australian echelon, thus reinforced, moving behind a mobile curtain of artillery and overcame by impulse the strong points of Bu Rim (23 marzo CC.NN. Div.) and Garridia (62nd *Marmarica* Inf. Div.). The 2/1st battalion constituted a defensive flank towards the north; the 2/3rd, with the tank squadron of the divisional cavalry, headed slowly for Bardia; the 2/2nd headed towards south-east in direction of the Bardia-Fort Capuzzo roadway. Immediately the defense entered into crisis. The III Group of the 21st Corps artillery was suddenly flanked by British tanks, such that its commander did not hesitate to ask for suppression fire on his own unit, the fire was executed by the artillery behind the 28 ottobre. Soon the strong point of Summas fell. It was a long sequence of small but fierce clashes with fierce resistance and rapid subsidence. When Bergonzoli had news of the breakthrough and its size (nearly eight kilometers!) ordered the commander of the 116th infantry to prepare a counterattack. To that end, he sent the little he had - a company of M.13 tanks and a few guns 47/32 and 20 mm. mounted on lorries

- and requested the immediate influx of the CXXXV Camicie Nere battalion with two batteries of 75/27 and the rest of the XX Light Tank Battalion. The events were falling. The Command of the 116th infantry was quickly nearly invested and encircled by the enemy, so as to no longer be able to adjust the action of the M13 tank company, still far away. It might simply indicate the most profitable direction that a counterattack for falling on the flank of the looming enemy. But all was useless because the small armored unit, under the command of the chief of the operations section of the XXIII Corps, was demolished in its approach by violent artillery fire. Only the six tanks that reached the action and succeeded to penetrate into the Australian ranks for a certain depth were destroyed one after the other by two antitank guns.

Towards 09:00 the 16th Australian brigade had reached its objectives and Bergonzoli knew from the radio intercepts that the enemy announced already the capture of 8,000 prisoners. Then he telegraphed to the Comando Superiore the seriousness of the situation and asking the urgent participation of the air force and possibly a sortie from Tobruk. Even if the demonstrative action on the northern front had not given troubles and an attempt on the south had been decisively rejected by the 63rd *Cirene*, the state of things was really worrisome. Not only the raid in the heart of the defense appeared no more arguable, but from the sea and the sky the English forces had come to give a hand to the 6th Australian Division. And that hand! At 08:10 the battleships *Warspite*, *Valiant* and *Barham* with seven destroyers had opened the fire against Bardia and for three quarters of an hour a rain of shells fell on the fort, while the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* supplied aerial patrols of protection. After the performance of the big ships, the *Terror* and five gunboats carried out an intermittent fire for some hours. The bombers of the *Royal Air Force* were raged instead against the airports of el Gazala, Derna, Martuba and Tmimi leaving to the fighters the control of the space between Bardia and Tobruk. At 10:00 Bergonzoli signaled most serious the situation and still urgently requested the participation of R. Aeronautica, unfortunately in vain.

The second phase of the battle of that first day began at 11:30 with an attack of the 17th Australian brigade against the Mrega area. Was lead by three battalions and, a small unit of *cruisers* but once again it was rejected and it remained pinned to the ground for all the rest of the day. In compensation - for Mackay the things in the inside of the fortress were flourishing. At Midway

entire the 116th infantry was completely overwhelmed and the position of the 62nd *Marmarica* reduced to the forces of the 115th infantry and to eleven surviving light tanks of the LXII Battalion. The Australian units proceeded towards south-east penetrating, destroying the pockets of resistance, raking the sections exceeded, operating on wide front and investing commands, transmission centers and positions of artillery. The impossibility to react effectively and with good reason, hold the reins of the combat became increasingly clear along with discouragement. The batteries were firing without saving ammunition but the presence of too many objectives and the fluidity of the action unavoidably carried to a dispersion fire and result not proportionate to the engagement. In the first hours of the afternoon the strong point of the I/115th infantry who blocked the road for Fort Capuzzo overwhelmed. Soon after the strong points in the area were overrun. At 15:00 they were still in holding the last two strong points of the 62nd *Marmarica* (and the III battalion of the 115th infantry) between the *Wadi Scemmas* and the *Wadi Halgh el-Ahmar*. The Command of the 62nd *Marmarica* division moved itself near that of the 63rd *Cirene*. The Australian attack continued decidedly towards the south, in the Mrega area, against the large strong point held by I and II Battalions of the 157th infantry and by the II Group of the 45th artillery. Very soon this also fell and the division was therefore deprived of the fundamental pillar that gave safety to the entirety right flank and blocked the way of the *Wadi* where was found the Command of the area. At 18:00 Bergonzoli com informed that there was no other way to rectify the situation. Every major unit had received his order to resist as it could, even if isolated.

As night falls, therefore, nearly all the Ponticelli area, that of the headquarters, was in possession of the enemy; only the two strong points of the II and III/115th Infantry resisted. The 63rd *Cirene* Division had the two advanced strong points of Souta and Sidi Hasan engaged and the front of the throat, or better the rears already partially disrupted. To the north the 23 *marzo* Division, lost the advanced strong points of Bu Rim and Shegheila, tried to form a defensive front against the attacks from the rear and the 28 *ottobre* Division was grouped with the elements remaining towards the strong points of Atica and Raheb.

The fighting of the 3rd had, among other things, carried to strong consumptions of artillery ammunition, moreover the units still in fight suffered from sparsely of water and provisions. The nighttime supply attempts came to nothing. The morning of the 4th the 16th Australian Brigade, reinforced by the 2/8th Battalion of the 19th Brigade, took head on

the residual resistance of the Portcullis area: after a short fight also the II and III battalions of the 115th infantry were overwhelmed. Then it was the time of the Mrega area. The 63rd *Cirene* by now fought on a front more overwhelmed than on the southern perimeter of the fortress: the two strong points of the III/157th and II/158th no longer resisted. Towards 16:00 "the inside of the egg" was almost empty and the enemy entered Bardia. Bergonzoli had been carried more and more to the north. Reaching the strong point of Atica, to the northern extremity of the defensive perimeter, requesting news on the events in course in the area of the 63rd *Cirene* and he renewed the order to resist as best able. Then the last connections stopped definitively: the radios were nearly all destroyed, the few that remained had exhausted batteries, the telephone lines, were interrupted, the couriers left and not returning hence fallen or taken captive. The circle around the 63rd *Cirene* was always tightening more. At dusk the enemy sent an envoy to advise the yield in order to avoid further useless spilling of blood. After a fast consultation between Generals Tracchia and De Guidi, the commanders of the 62nd *Marmarica* and the 63rd *Cirene*, the envoy was given a refusal: the resistance would be continued. There was not a lot remaining in the Mrega area: the II/158th Infantry, the rest of the LXIII machine-gun battalion, part of the III Group of the 45th Artillery and a group of 149/35, the works of the strong point of the frontier guard were stretched thin.

The morning of the 5th all the forward fire was concentrated on the last defense. When the few *Matilda* still serviceable arrived on the artillery positions began the countdown. At 13:00 all was ended. Bergonzoli, decided to escape imprisonment, succeeded to gradually escape capture with a group of men losing weight along the distance from Bardia to Tobruk (120 kilometers), traveling at night through the British positions and hiding during the day. On 9 January Graziani would send to the Comando Supremo a terse telegram: "*At 17:30 hours we are presented at the obstruction of Sidi Daud at Tobruk, General Bergonzoli, General Amico, Consuls Nicchiarelli & Cirillo, plus some other officers & twenty-one troops arrived on foot skirting the sea*" ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. In three days of combat the 6th Australian Division had 456 losses. The 10th Army lost another 45,000 men. 430 guns, 13 medium and 117 light tanks, and some hundreds of trucks including in such figures dead, wounded and prisoners, means destroyed or captured for the material.

It's time to make a few comments. The second step of the *via crucis** of the 10th Army had been complete. And also the fall of Bardia had been bitter, must acknowledge here of unquestionable and also the numerous episodes of valor by individuals and units. A critical appraisal of the defense in the particular is naturally out of place; however a very close examination seems lawful giving at least some vicissitudes for endeavor there some indication apt to explain the fall of Bardia therefore has its place.

First of all the dispositions. It was not a fortress, by agreement, but for enemy part was not explained by a overwhelming the superiority of forces. Attracts attention the fact that the first day - it is worth to say that already definitive - the penetration in the defensive system and the unbridgeable separation between the northern and southern sectors was the work of four battalions of infantry, one squadron of light tanks and twenty six *Matilda* tanks; troops that in less than four hours forced the obstacle, overrun three strong points of the frontier guard and another two or three divisional ones and captured eight thousand captives. One has previously pointed out of the existing probability of excessive distance between the obstacles and the weapons that had the task to activate them. In Bardia numerous gun of small-caliber existed in a position to carrying out antitank action, even if the armor-piercing munitions was available only for the 47/32 and 65/17 pieces. However, they do not know the criteria on which was set the deployment of the artillery of the XXIII Corps and, especially, the ability of these to also take part against the tanks satisfying the necessities of the contra-preparation, obstruction and suppression. Equally the alignment of the observers is not known. It seems however that, among the artilleries of the three areas of the 28 *ottobre* CC.NN. Division, it was made a group of counter-battery. When, on the dawn of 3 January, the 6th Australian Division intensified the fire with the characteristics of the preparation, the commander of the artillery imparted at once orders for the contra-preparation that, but, had already had principle for initiative of the fields and the group of counter-battery. A breakthrough occurred revealed the difficulty of harmonizing the operation of the fire with the antitank action, engaged at a distance of some hundred of meters from individual parts with shot pointing direct. The former became arduous to realize for the difficulties of observation and the variety of the more pressing objectives, the second was in practice left to the batteries, not accustomed to such employment

*Latin = way of the cross or the path of suffering

It was later in the campaign that will try to find a solution. The Germans will support the concept of subordinating the possibilities of movement of the fire as that of antitank. The Italians, and for them Gen. Manca di Mores, will remedy the difficulty of maneuvering the fire ground and try to avoid the involvement of the batteries in combat episodic strong points, on which they were forced to tighten to oppose the tanks, constituting, in the limits of the possible, an deployment of artillery strong points, behind of those of the forward infantry, able to perform shot isolated and grounded according to the goals to beat and the features of the front to be covered.

Also on the reaction movement something it seems is to say. The tactical doctrine of the time just did not contemplate the channeling of the enemy penetration towards one pre-studied annihilation zone where to make to converge a massive volume of fire and a violent counterattack, according to one or more hypothesis. Therefore as much as available was given to the fields that realized a second strip of static structures behind the frontier guard and held very loosely. The light tanks were for the greater part inefficient. Those in conditions for operating also were held to disposition knowing their the paltry war weight, the others were shared among the strong points and buried as machine-gun pillboxes. To Gen. Bergonzoli remained 28 *ottobre*, that did not seem to have received specific orders for a counterattack, and the M.13 tank company, even they give use when and where thought opportune. It happened so that the only participation ordered by the Commander of the XXIII Corps from the front to a decidedly alarming situation was translated to a small formation of tanks without much luminosity to the Command of the 116th Infantry for being used locally. In point of fact that unfortunately the attempt ran aground almost immediately, is difficult to accept the principle that the single card to play at the Army Corps level has been given to a sub-sector. The compact participation of the 28 *ottobre* reinforced by the medium tanks and strongly supported from the artillery could have obtained firm results? If it is considered that in depth it would have been launched against two or three battalions at the maximum, given the opening to fan of Australian penetration, would have to be answered affirmatively. If one takes into account the actual conditions in which were the Blackshirts units justified doubts arise. However the use of the division in dribs and drabs and when it was much too late is not plausible. Basically, it cannot be sustain that for a fact the conduct of

the defense had been well set up and that the action of command had been manifested with clarity of vision of the fight. From the careful study of the various reports it emerges as obvious, starting at 09:00 of 3 January, every division has had to think next to if entrusting itself to the static resistance of the strong points alone that the enemy eliminated one by one like the leaves of a artichoke.

The reports are rather emphatic: it is human. All describe great masses of tanks breaking out from every point. The attack of the 17th Australian Brigade was attributed to an entire division with at least one hundred tanks. It would be easy to make of the irony on these judgments but, for objectivity, it is necessary to go back to the origins. The information supplied by the S.I.M. - we have seen - not been sparing with certainty on the number of British divisions thought present and more or less all the levels than command could not be not infected from the psychosis of a crushing superiority of the enemy under every aspect, for ground, air and sea. Knowing their own situation well, the single thought that against Bardia were being flung two armored divisions and three or four of infantry, with 700 aircraft and the entire *Mediterranean Fleet*, difficultly could raise the moral of the defenders already jolted by the previous events (to outside of the circumstance phrases and petty rhetoric of the documents of the time and the personal memoirs).

The demand for a sortie from Tobruk in order to break the attack to Bardia was utopian. Bergonzoli very well knew he asked the impossible. What instead he had full authority to expect was aerial involvement. He invoked it often and still more often complained of "*our absent aircraft*". Also the English found insufficient the aerial contribution in the defense of Bardia. But, also lavishing herself generously, the Italian air force was in a precarious condition. Unfortunately it was be a matter of the unavoidable consequence of not having been able to conserve a better deployment of the fighters. It by now succeeding only to reach Bardia with fast attacks without some possibility to protect with cruises of a certain duration the besieged troops. About the dispatch of the *Ju.87* dive-bomber aircraft was lacking, three causes weighed on not accepting the insistent demands of Graziani. First of all, in the same moment the Supreme Commander in Albania also formulated the same question and he was also Chief of General Staff and clearly the Albanian theatre was more important than the North African in the eyes of Mussolini. Secondly, the *Ju.87* could only employ German ammunition, given the particular system

of attack and uncoupling of the bombs. In order to use the aircraft in Libya it would have been, therefore, necessary to preliminarily dispatch their bombs, equipments and specialist personnel. In the third place the *Ju.87* suffered from detached vulnerability for the characteristics of flight and the particular form of its employment. Consequently they had to be escorted by numerous fighters, that it was impossible materially, apart from the already mentioned inferiority on the front to the *Hurricane* and the *Spitfire*.

4. The BATTLE of TOBRUK (21-23 JANUARY 1941)

Wavell had calculated that, losing Bardia, Graziani could have only counted on one division (the 61st *Sirte*), with troops of the Army Corps and residual of beaten divisions, at Tobruk, a second division (the 60th *Sabratha*) still more to the west and one Armored formation around Mechili. He was well informed. With this presupposed he had decided to proceed on Tobruk before completing the mopping-up of Bardia, in as much as the operation, of obvious convenience under the tactical profile, did not introduce excessive difficulties on the logistic plan. Therefore the morning of 5 January put in motion the 7th Armored Brigade and the next day blocked Tobruk from the west. On 7 Decembers arrived the other brigades of the 7th Armored Division and the 6th Australian.

In these circumstances the letter with which Graziani briefed Mussolini could not be that of drastic and bitter alarm for the perspectives of the moment, of justification of the decisions taken previously, of demand for an aid shortly: "*This morning has begun the investment of the fortress from part of the enemy medium armor. After that the several episodes of the new drama are easy expectable*". Approve in fact of the outcome the defense of Bardia, was not from hoping that Tobruk - 22.000 men and 340 guns for 54 kilometers of defensive town-walls - it could resist better and much longer. Worse still, we could not be deceived that English stopped themselves in their offensive push. And the Derna-Berta-Mechili line, on which to the maximum 20,000 men could be scraped together, 350 guns and 60 medium tanks, offered very little confidence. "*And then the Cyrenaica will be lost*". What thing could, in fact, oppose the 17 British divisions, the 700 front line aircraft more than 400 in reserve, plus approximately another 500 en route, without counting those of the five English aircraft carriers located in the Mediterranean? After all "*the salvation*"

of Libya today are tied to the will of the enemy". He must admit that taking for good the information on the adversary, as much as Graziani said was substantially logical. Concluding the letter asking polemically for reinforces and accusing the **Comando Supremo**, that is to say Badoglio:

"They [the forces able to resolve the situation] therefore can only come from the Motherland and on this point my judgment awaits for transmitting to the Joint Chief of Staff that of this whole affair, from the July until now, I kept minutely and constantly informed as the documents of the office, o the genesis of cause and effect will be easily indeterminable and with it the calculation of responsibilities that I will ask of inquirers starting from mine, in due time" ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾.

In Rome Guzzoni he was working hard. On January 4, he presented a note to Mussolini, invoking the decision to constitute a large armored unit in Libya:

"Given the developments of the situation it appears urgent to examine the possibility to give to Marshal Graziani a major unit in order to replace those lost and giving him means in order to act, if possible, counter-offensively in Cyrenaica or at least in order to defend Tripolitania (...).

Independently from the shipment of the German Armored Divisions, and in the expectation that can begin their transport, it would seem therefore beyond necessary also possible to decide at once the shipment to Libya of the *Ariete* ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Armored Division and the *Trento* ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Motorized Division (...).

Their transport could be carried out before the transport of the German Armored Divisions who will not be able to reach the boarding ports before three to four weeks (...)" ⁽¹⁵¹⁾.

The letter of Graziani induced the Undersecretary of Joint Chief of Staff to take part. The defensive ability to the unexpected system of successive resistances, unavoidably weak and based on the employment a little at a time of the forces - he commented - if he could intend the scope to slow down the enemy dash, he did not seem to grant to excessive illusions on his ability to definitive arrest for obvious reasons. The question was then the offer the case if he convenes to continue to project little by little the forces towards Cyrenaica or if it were preferable to try to constitute around the 5th Army a mass of maneuver. The transport difficulties were noted,

however he had to make every effort in order to realize this band of forces to use in its organic composition excluding fragmented use in itself unprofitable. In the case in which the abandonment of Cyrenaica had become necessary the picture was not shown then to much gloomy shades. According to the opinion of the Chiefs of General Staff of Navy and the Air Force, the abandonment of Tobruk would have moved undoubtedly the strategic-naval problem of the Mediterranean strengthening the English position. But in the local circle the situation would not be changed too much for the worse: Tripoli would have become a new Tobruk nearer to the Motherland and support. The Air Force, then, was in a position to reconstituting in the space of a month its own efficiency. In the existing fields and those in via of armament in the Tripolitania sufficient influx aircraft could be amassed from Italy; moreover it could be counted on the support from the fields of Sicily and Pantelleria ⁽¹⁵²⁾. After all, Guzzoni suggested a directive based on four points: to arrest or at least to refrain the English advance on prearranged positions; to avoid further sending of troops from Tripolitania; to give again efficiency with means and units flowing to the 5th Army, yes to constitute with it a organic mass of maneuver; to employ such mass, the attainment of adapted consistency, according to the circumstances and the situation.

Just at that very moment the OKW requested, through the German embassy in Rome, a judgment from the Italian side on the strategic situation in the Mediterranean after the fall of Bardia *"for being able to decide from our part if the shipment of German forces to Tripoli is possible and has hope of success"* ⁽¹⁵³⁾. Guzzoni made to compile a immediately memo all optimistic adding: in the worse case the English, arrived at Benghazi, would have been forced to arrest for a long time because of the enormous logistic difficulties of going further. While the reinforcements were being transported to Libya and towards the end of February the availability of a *"discreet"* maneuver mass was previewed. A final phrase, but, was all one program:

"In conclusion, as it has been already said, the situation is serious; it is not deprived of hope but not even such to exclude that the Cyrenaica, and in the course of time also Tripolitania can be occupied by the English ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾".

No known observations of Mussolini on the subject. It only knows that no finished draft directive that is offered and that

he resolved to send to Graziani a frankly superficial message, resuming the hypothesis advanced by the Marshal that a powerful diversion to another theater of operations would perhaps have lightened the pressure of Wavell:

"This diversion is in sight. This is the Germanic contribution against Greece planned for early March & for which Germany is preparing & hauling to Romania a number of divisions that imposing & immobilize Turkey and if eliminate Greece -as we hope -this is not already the case for our work (...)".

It followed that Britain would have to come to the aid of Greece and Turkey and that the forces necessary for this purpose could not be taken from Egypt. *Ergo* was not to be considered absurd by the news SIM gathered, according to which, after the conquest of Tobruk, Wavell would stop and would transfer its control in Athens.

"For more and more convince him of the necessity of this transfer must around Tobruk impose the maximum possible attrition of British armored forces and that's what you do. This is the time it takes to earn the German threat to British bases in the eastern Mediterranean to the English to appear in all its grandeur and immediacy".

The conclusion was typical: "*The attack of the Germans with the objective of Thessaloniki already disturbs the Greek sleep & will not be very long to trouble those of the English*" ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾. The mind of Mussolini was not even touched by the idea that probably the thought of having to "to last" until March would have a lot more disturbed sleep of Graziani. The Comando Supremo could not to prevent the obvious message, but he knew it unsustainable. Therefore on 11 January sent a short note to the S.I.M.:

"The news "from a reliable source" that General Wavell taken Tobruk would turn his efforts elsewhere has had remarkable repercussions on our guidelines.

It would seem therefore opportune - if possible - to try of control and specify it.

It does not seem logical that the British offensive to arrest at the fortress of Tobruk. If he will ever be arrested by the desert *sirtico*, after he occupies

occupy all of Cyrenaica, restoring the situation that we had when among our bases to the Cyrenaican border and the British was the desert "

And the S.I.M. not only did not confirm the forecasts of movement of troops to the Balkans but it supplied news of new arrivals into the North African theater of operations:

12 January: "they are landed Egypt, early this month, about 4,000 Australians, more than 200 tanks & 200 American produced aircraft ...";

14 January: "It turns out that 8 Arm. is journeyed for Cairo one reserve armored division of which at our the S.1109 of the 3rd current";

16 January: "Another 100 American produced bombers type *Glen Martin* would have to flow next to Egypt... a Second note to assess day of the 17th a convoy with arms and ammunitions directed to Egypt would have to probably leave from Gibraltar";

18 January: "Convoy in Gibraltar departure probably day of the 17th... also would carry troops and according other news so far not controlled Cyrenaica would direct actions for landing";

21 January: "It is specified that English troop transport convoy of 20 steamboats arrived at Suez 2nd current totaling 10,000 men approximately. As well as reported, said convoy would have transported: 60 heavy tanks, 180 armored car, 200 light tanks *Ironsides*, 200 small-caliber guns and medium-caliber gun, 19,000 ammunition cases. Steamboats believed to have continued in part for Greece".

You can criticize the S.I.M. for the reconstruction of the opponent order of battle; you can not fault him for the news is not always reliable (i.e. the number of divisions about to thrown on Bardia); but has many mitigating and his valuable defender may be just Churchill, who never tired of protest because the accounts of the forces do not add up.. On 10 November, still before of the beginning of the offensive of O' Connor, he wrote to the Chief of Staff of the *Royal Air Force*:

"About 1,000 aircraft and 17,000 airmen in the Middle East contribute to form and equip 30 squadrons, and a half, with an initial total of 395 war planes, 300 of which is assumed to be ready to enter service at any time (...).

On the difference between the great mass of men and airplane and the sum of the aircraft in war service is the wastage of the resources

of our Air Force. To that what serves the 600 aircraft that are not included in the initial equipment of the 30 squadrons? Some, sure, have been absorbed from the training fields, the communications and the transports. But as it is explained that of the 732 military aircraft only 395 participated in the combat? (...)" ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾.

On 9 December addressed to the minister of war, that he next proposed to call to arms approximately a million men, expressing strong doubts on the employment of the personnel: were justified 540,000 men of the army support services alone and army corps for the 27 existing British divisions? were justified a good 70,000 men for the troops of safety in the Middle East? were justified 350,000 men for the territorial Commands and services in the United Kingdom? and the 500,000 for the antiaircraft defense of Great Britain?

"Before that I can ask the Cabinet every consent to further call to arms - Churchill admonished - it is necessary that the entire issue is minutely shifted and at least a million arrive men carded and fanning from the confusion to the rear of the combatant units and carried to serve effective military goals" ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾.

On 6 January, in a letter to the Gen. Ismay, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defense, calculated that:

"If we estimate the current total force of the armies in the Middle East at approximately 370,000 men (comprised convoys W.S. 5 and 6), we could reasonably be waiting for the latter to have supplied to the necessary garrisons to the garrison of Ethiopia, Cyrenaica, Egypt and Palestine, it is found re-united in the valley of the Nile the equivalent of ten divisions (...)" ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

In short, it was not surely easy to gain and to hold the enemy modernized war instrument on the basis of its potentiality.

Graziani had to make a decision and on 9 January circulated the directives for the delaying battle on the Derna- Berta- Mechili line, implicitly giving for lost also Tobruk, which the only task to earn some time remained. The foretold system

"Must be considered the *Grappa** of Libya and to you must repeat the

*The author uses *Grappa*, which is references a World War One battle.(Monte Grappa)

miracle of Grappa, and that is to say the enemy must be arrested by you, with the unshakable decision in the commanders and followers to *die in the place rather than to yield*.

This decision must be taken root in all, from the commander to the last follower; all must keep in mind the fall of the Derna-Berta-Mechili system means the invasion of Libya, what does not have to verify them at all costs (...).

Perhaps a little drastic attempts and rhetorical would have been preferable, because to all luminosity Mechili appeared as simply an isolated point in the desert, one of the totally untied from the true Derna-Berta system. Consequently, did not find in conditions to bear an attack of armor and, always consequently, also western Cyrenaica would have been invaded without that the positions of Derna-Berta could exercise a real weight in the fight.

To the programmatic preamble they followed dispositions on the organization of the strong points, on the positions of the artilleries and reserves. To this last purpose he sent the order giving to the V Tank Battalion (M 13) to the Armored Brigade and collecting the 10th Bersaglieres with one company of 47/32 and one battery of 20 millimeter towards Berta, which unit of maneuver in the hands of the Commander of the Army. Which Commander would have had all the right to constitute his own reserve according to his own understandings. But he puts account to above all find the separation of the Bersaglieres (which is simply motorized) from the tanks: evidently on the topic of the employment of armored troops many uncertainties existed still. In conclusion:

"The resistance is preparing to oppose the "fort" of Tobruk with serenity and firmness that his commander shows (...) gives us the assurance that we will have the time to improve our current situation and therefore, the battle of arrest, not counting those who we are or how we should be given on the Berta - Mechili axis, with support of the left wing, Derna, which has a good chance of resistance even if isolated, once blown interruptions.

Everyone must impress himself deeply in my heart that:

- On Derna - Mechili or you win or you die:
- On it we play our honor and the salvation of Libya (...) " (159)

Mussolini approved with an emphatic telegram that left things as they were. Indeed they were bad. Even the appearance of areal contest was worrying. The wear and tear of the aircraft appeared

dizzying and the influx of the replacements from Italy followed the undulations of the vicissitudes with which the units of the army arrived. The depressing effect is undeniable that derives from communication flowing between Rome and Cyrene, from the moment in which from the Comando Supremo left it "*I have ordered*" or "*I have decided*" from Mussolini circa the shipment of a determined unit or of equipment. Those that looked as to arrive from one day to the other found difficulties of various kinds and the weeks passed. Graziani was not to blame when on 10 January he complained to have received - after a month from the beginning of the British offensive - only units (among which were the 10th Bersaglieres and the V Tank Battalion) and materials previously already programmed. And the following day, so that Col. Granata, coming from Rome, informed me that the *Ariete* and the *Trento*, was "en route", Guzzoni telegraphed at once to, tell him that for as the news was not born from official communication he had disclosed it "*in order to hold the moral high*". After to still have placed in evidence the urgency of reinforces, place that by now he had given deeply from every resource, requested with obvious hopes and doubts: "*Tell me at least, I pray to you, clarify if as says Col. Granata is exact and in way of performance*" ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. Guzzoni answered that "*beginning next is the transfer of the Ariete division*". Three abundant weeks still had to pass.

Therefore, on 5 January Gen. Porro well informed but not being in a position to carrying out offensive operations: all the more he could scrape together about eighty aircraft of various types. On the 9th Mussolini communicated to Graziani that, with the arrival of the German X Corp in Sicily ⁽¹⁶¹⁾, "*in about ten days*" would be arriving at Benghazi a our group of dive bombers, two groups of fighters and one Stormo of bombers. The two groups of fighters (the 18th returning from Belgium and the 155th of new constitution) will arrive in Africa on 29 January, the 96th bombing group with Ju. 87 (on which was mounts to rest Italian bombs) the 1st of February ⁽¹⁶²⁾. It must be said also that von Rintelen had asked, in the name of the OKW, if the transfer in Libya of two groups of *Stuka* and a group of *Zerstorer* were appreciated. "*He had been answered that the provision is not thought convenient* - the entry in the historical Diary of the Comando Supremo - *since a transfer to North Africa would put in crisis the C.A. T. already just arrived. Moreover the German air forces, in the current location, can act also in Libya dealing with bases of support in Tripolitania*" ⁽¹⁶³⁾.

While Graziani circulated the orders for the delaying battle,

Pricolo sent to Porro a long letter reflecting the principles of employment of the units of the 5th Air Fleet. The directives closely derived from a discouraging affirmation:

"In dependency of the painful verified events and in consequence of the true mass slaughter of aircraft, it is not absolutely possible to restore, I do not say the aerial superiority, but not even a supportable inferiority; it is therefore indispensable that the aerial units of the 5th Fleet are employed essentially and nearly exclusively in the said fight against aviation (...)"

Therefore the actions of bombing, nocturnal sorties, (against ships, bases and airfields) had to be turned against important objectives, the fighters had to limit themselves to flights of cruise in the territory of Benghazi and the torpedo bombers only against adapted targets, to the standard of the most rigid economy. The conclusion was still more depressing. Porro had to obtain from the Comando Superiore to whom the aerial units were employed closely according the criteria at issue for that, while the arrival of the units already announced was confirmed, *"it will not be possible in future to provide eventual to a new reconstitution of the aerial units located in I.N.A."* ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾.

On 10 January Gen. Pitassi Mannella, considered the impossibility to receive any aid from the ground, blew up the bridges of Sidi Daud (on the road for Bardia) and the *Wadi es Sahel* (on the road for Derna).

Tobruk was last through various hands from the beginning of the hostilities. At first employed by Commander of the XXI Corps, On 18 June had been assigned to the XXII Corps. This at once faced some of the more urgent problems: the constituted of the perimeter obstacle of the Anti-tank ditch and the wire, the first almost nonexistent and the second in action to 50%; the former organization *ex novo** of fire, especially from the batteries of most recent formation, whose personnel, in nearly the totality, did not have still acquired a minimum of acquaintance of the material; the antitank defense; the defense against the incursions of the medium armor and English armored cars and the necessity to maintain the communications open with Bardia and Bir el-Gobi.

The works of fortification was headed by two distinguished agencies. The care of Command territorial engineer of Benghazi, the means of the private companies or working units of the engineer, the work of permanent character already begun, among which was the anti-tank ditch, the ammunition depots and fuel

*Latin = from new; Said about something built from scratch, or from the beginning

in the cave, the system distillation for sea water, the sheds for the stock sections of the artillery and engineers sections, the automotive workshop, works for all the materials which already was set aside. The Fortress Command did not ever have interference or otherwise entitled to use the materials collected for the specific needs. It was only consulted, towards the end of August, on whether to continue the work of the anti-tank ditch. Against the opinion of the Comando Supremo, that he considered the political-military situation created, expressed the opinion that to suspend the obstacle would have been a large error. However in the second half of September nearly all the civil enterprises and the working units were transferred to the Fort Capuzzo-Sollum-Sidi el-Barrani area for being employed in road work and water systems in forecast of the advance on Marsa Matruh. Therefore at Tobruk it was continued to only to attend to ammunitions and fuel depots. The anti-tank ditch section, now announced, was around twelve kilometers and had a depth of 1.50 m and a width of 3 m.

The fortress Command had to supply instead to all the other types of works with the handicraftsmen company of the 64th *Catanzaro* Inf. Div. (from 18 June made part of the garrison) and a mixed engineer unit of the frontier guard, using as personal labor of the units in place, compatibly with the pre-eminent requirements of the defense and the training. Moreover the work possibilities came to decrease quickly: at the end of July the 64th *Catanzaro* was moved to the Gambut-Marsa Lucch area, at the orders of the XXIII Corps, and after the 15th of September the gradual movement of many units of the frontier guard had begun in order to reconstitute the garrisons of the border line and in the area of the Halfaya and of Sidi el-Barrani. Hence when on 30 September Gen. Pitassi Mannella, commander of XXII Corps, yielded the command of the fortress to Gen. Umberto Barberis, Commander of the frontier guard, every working activity was practically stopped for deficiency of materials and of workers. The first of October a strip of the wire very little balanced but seven-eight meters deep ran along the entire town-walls, from the *Zeitun Wadi* to south to the *Wadi es Sahel* to north.

The events of December gave an abrupt jolt to the stasis. The morning of 10 December Graziani called Pitassi Mannella, who had just been given command of south-east of Tobruk, and newly entrusted with the responsibility of the fortress. The 61st *Sirte* Inf. Div. (Gen. Dalla Mura) would be moved at once but the eventual employment had to be left available for the outside use. The day after Pitassi Mannella

received an order still more clearly: he had to assume personally the Command of Tobruk with the task of resisting to the bitter end and with the full availability of all the existing land forces in that place.

On the 12th was circulated the first written order for the new order of the fortress (sketch n. 16). The defense concept headed necessarily at the practical resistance mainly at the fortified town-walls and extended the as much as possible in depth with the defense organization of all active elements available. In case of initial enemy success the resistance in place of *all residual means* of fire in the attempt to divide the attack was previewed, to slow down the speed of progression, to wear him out as much as possible a premised counterattack exercised from the central reserve. In case being besieged it was necessary to disturb enemy preparations, yes to delay the beginning of the attack and to obligate English to a greater engagement of troops. Consequently, the maximum of the fire reaction was organized and beyond the fortified perimeter, but independently from that the spirit of initiative of the unit commanders was allowed the widest freedom of stimulating participation. He was prescribed that all the arms must have a fire sector of 360° and that no limitation, but that one of the effective throw, had throw to the fire in any direction, wherever and however the enemy introduced itself, without economy of ammunition and fear to hit our units or our elements already made captive. He was equally of the prescribed that every combatant element - including Commands - had to organize for the close defense and to such goal all the machine-guns and the auto-cannons found in the artillery warehouse was distributed in adding to equipment ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾. Behind of the area of the artillery deployment as became organized a kind of second position along the Bejadbivio *Wadi* for el Adem-Pilastrino-Gabr el Abd. More than strong points in truth it was a matter of isolated positions destined to represent the outline of bags of control of the penetrations.

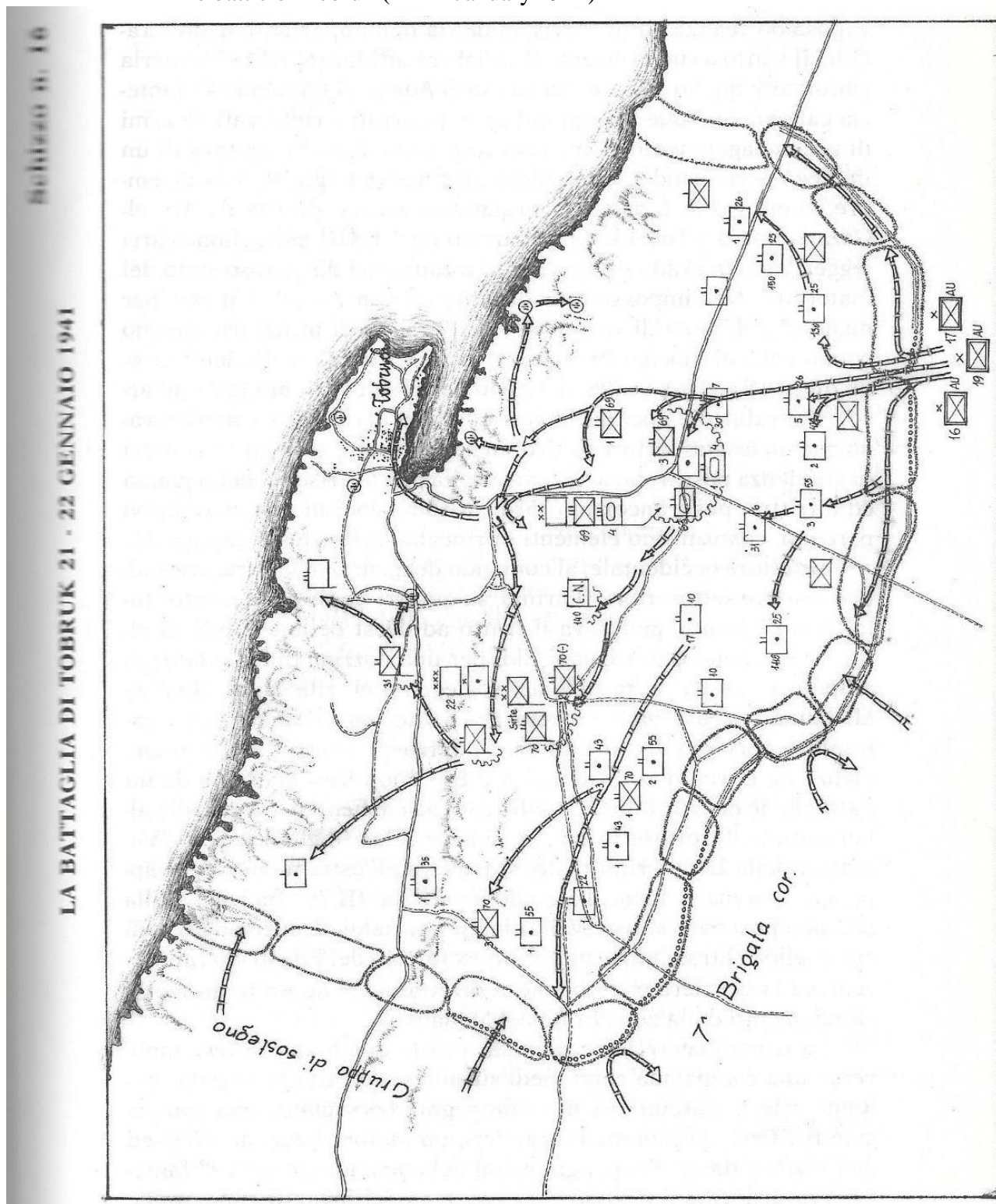
The ground frontline was split into two fields. The eastern, under the command of Gen. Barberis, was articulated on four strong points (sub sector A, with approximately 12 kilometers of front) from the sea to Bir Junes, obstruction of the road from Bardia, and two strong points (sub sector B, approximately wide 8 kilometers) blocking of the road of el-Adem. The strong points covering the sector were garrisoned by the XXXI frontier guard reinforced, supported by four Companies of the 69th Infantry. To the rear, at a distance of four-five kilometers, the second position was found, hinged on the large

The Italian Forces Employed in the Defense of Tobruk

Command of the XXII Army Corps 61st <i>Sirte</i> Inf. Div. 69th Infantry Reg. 70th Infantry Reg. 51st Bers. Motorcycle Company 61st 81mm Mortar Company 61st 47/32 Gun Company LXI machinegun battalion LXI complements Battalion 43rd Artillery LXI Engineer Battalion services unit Frontier Guard: XXXI field cover XXXII field cover (aliq.) minor units Delegations from the Quartermaster: units & service organs of the Quartermaster	Support of the Army Corps: 10th Artillery Regiment 22nd Artillery Regiment 25th Artillery Regiment 55th Artillery Division Volunteers of Libya CC.NN Battalion CXL CC.NN Battalion I/4th Infantry Tanks LXIII Light Tank Battalion (*) 141st 81mm Mortar Company 142nd 81mm Mortar Company 25th 47/32 Gun Company 22nd Bers. Motorcycle Company 55th Transport Company services unit
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Of the two light tank battalions presents in Tobruk, LXIII and XXI, the first one had absorbed the remains of the second, whose personnel, united with those recoverable from the M.11 tank battalion, was transported to Benghazi to construe the XXI M.13 tank battalion, with the materials coming from Italy.

The battle of Tobruk (21-22 January 1941)



strong point built in correspondence of the important road junction. The section to south-east (towards Bardia) was entrusted to the III/69th Infantry reinforced; that one to the south-west (towards el-Adem) under the Command of the 4th Infantry Tank with two tank battalions buried and reinforced by infantry-support weapons to fire direct and to fire indirect. It was an unorthodox use but no better alternatives. On 14 Decembers, as it already has been said, the Armored Brigade, ordered to Ain el-Gazala, left in Tobruk the I/4th Tank Battalion and the LXIII Light Tank Battalion, not in a position to continuing because of the disastrous state of the material. In the impossibility to replace means in order for lack of replacement parts and in the attempt of utilize them at least as is, fire direction centers the 39 M.11 tanks and 32 inefficient L tanks were located in the strong point for the crossroad for el-Adem on more lines to arc. Naturally the guns and the machine-guns in casemate did not have that a meager fire sector. Later on seven M tanks the remained in efficiency passed to make part of small the reserve of the fortress and another three, still later placed in conditions than to complete short distances, constituted support elements of the same strong point.

The western sector, under the command of Gen. Dalla Mura, it was subdivided into three sub-sectors. The first one, with four strong points for eight kilometers of front, watching the section to the west of the el-Adem roadway; the second, with three strong points for a dozen of linear kilometers, had the main support in the relief of Ras el-Medauar and blocked the road from Acroma; the third, with three strong points and little more than eight kilometers of front, controlled the road from Derna. The A and B sub-sectors were each defended by a battalion of the 70th Infantry reinforced by elements of the frontier guard. Sub-sector C, garrisoned by "Volunteers of Libya" CC.NN. Battalion reinforced, it was found to the extreme north and was anchored by the sea. The support was supplied by the III/70th Infantry. In the second position were found five strong points disposed in an arc, of which that of the headquarters hinged on the former blockhouse of Pilastrino it represented the hinge and it was opposed directly to an attempt of breakthrough from the area of Ras el-Medauar.

The central reserve group all of which could maneuver: one medium tank company with only seven M tanks and the two fast columns, each with one Bersaglieres company, one rifle company, a machine-gun platoon, a 47/32 gun platoon and one 20 mm section. Orders sent to the Commander of the 69th Infantry, was located in the shelter of the strong points of the crossroad of el-Adem. The participation hypotheses, studied and tried, considered penetration from the south verses the alternative and from the west verses the Pilastrino.

On artillery maneuver should stop briefly. It was ordered in three multi-caliber groupings, of which two at disposition of the eastern sector (123 guns) and one of the eastern sector (97 guns) and the organization of the fire had enjoyed a lot of attention.

The barrier was intended, besides to the divisional groups, the artilleries from 105/28 bore to 149/13 excluding only the 105/25 and the 149/35 of the frontier guard, dealing with materials on rigid gun carriage. Altogether 172 pieces had approximately 41 kilometers to bar, with a density of 250 meters for each piece, it is worth to say each section to that normally assigned to one battery. Obviously the more important sections were assigned as a normal task at least one or two groups and as eventual task to the other groups, so that, as an example, on approximately two kilometers of front in which the enemy breached operated acted 52 pieces : II/43rd with 75/27 and CV/25th with 149/13 with the normal task; the III/55th with 75/27, the CXXX/25th with 149/13 and the 2nd battery of the XV group with 75/46 with eventual task or of aid.

The barrier was intended, in addition to groups divisional artillery caliber 105/28 to 105/25 and 149/13 exclude only the 149/35 of the guard at the border, in the case of materials to gun carriage drive. A total of 172 pieces had approximately 41 km to bar, with a density of one piece every 250 meters, that is to say a stretch equal to that normally assigned to a battery. Obviously the most important traits were assigned as normal task to at least one or two groups and a task to any other groups, so that, for example, about two kilometers from the front in which the enemy worked the breach acted 52 pieces: the II / 43 ° 75/27 and the CV / 25 ° from normal task with 149/13; the III / 55 ° 75/27, the CXXX / 25 ° to 149/13 and 2nd battery XV group 75/46 with assignment possible or collaboration.

On the action of interdiction the artilleries of the fortress participated by all, leaving the far interdiction to the section "Buffolotti" (two pieces of 149/35 of the frontier guard) near the street obstruction of Bir Um Haleiga; on battery "Nembo" (two twin mounts of 120/40 from the R. Marina) near the crossroad of el-Adem; the ship *S. Giorgio* (four pieces of 190 and four of 254). The entire action of interdiction and especially that a distance could not first of all be based on that of aerial observation and that on the ground in a subsidiary way. Now, before having completed the first still to exist that it began the attack; the second was feeling the modest range of the observatories of raised chance and the cloud of dust from enemy means in motion.

For the counter-battery there was destined a battery for every divisional group and of the army corps, all the batteries of the frontier guard of 120/25 and 149/35 excluded for the obstruction, as well as the batteries "Nembo" and "Bellotti" of the Navy. More was not possible to do. To the sparsely of guns in relationship to the extension of the front joined to the disadvantage to many English and Australian batteries, thanks to the range superiority, might to assume deployments to the limit or beyond the Italian possibilities of shooting, therefore in many cases the counter-battery was, insufficient effective or not quite practicable. Among other things, most of the numerous stations identified in the period before the attack

was sure temporary in order to find and to control the data of shooting.

Given the obvious difficulties to characterize and to determine the objectives of the contra-preparation, this had been organized with the criterion first of all to address the shooting on objectives assessed (enemy batteries) but then progressively vanishing the attack, possibly with good reason, on obstruction and interdiction objectives subsequently.

Despite the measures taken and replicate devised, Pitassi Mannella grew few illusions, knowing that certain deficiencies could not be remedied.

The position of resistance was too loose mesh and without adequate depth for a more complex special conditions which in terms of absolute value. The works, incomplete and without cover, benefited from a random connection of fire because of dense and persistent dust that the wind, the bursting of projectiles opponents in the vicinity, and finally fire the same weapons of defense produced in front and around the strong point. Such powder could, as in truth it happened, acted as an artificial fog to favor of the attack, and its density and height on the land become such to render not only observation to a few meters of distance nearly impossible but also the visibility, from the rear, to the rockets launch from the works to demand for the obstruction shooting. At night, then, any lighting system was rendered vain from the foretold thick cloud of dust, however the lack of searchlights (there was only four) and illuminant rockets did not exist. Conversely allowed the enemy aerial reconnaissance photographs and excellent specifications and, consequently, at least a careful study of the strong points and the positions of the artillery. Add the acquaintance of the structure of the works acquired from the 6th Australian division at Bardia.

He weighed also the difficulty of the action of command at the lower levels. The strong points, under the command of a captain or a lieutenant, had a front that went from the two to the four kilometers; the sub-sectors reached seven-eight the kilometers. All with one entirely uncovered telephone network and therefore most vulnerable, and a poverty of radio equipment emphasized from the insufficient capacity in telephone and the disadvantages of the communications in telegraphy.

The antitank defense suffered from severe limitations otherwise. As he had tried to achieve even anti-tank ditches in the second position and deployments of artillery, the results were very poor for the few and rudimentary

means of labor and because the land, had a hard under layer just 30-40 centimeters, nearly introduced everywhere a compact limestone bank. It was made necessary to resort to stone walls that to the practical action showed very modest obstacle for tanks. However the availability of 7,000 controlled mines and 16,000 pressure mines allowed recently. The mined fields in correspondence of the perimeter sections lacking in anti-tank ditch (approximately 18 kilometers) had almost symbolic value: a front line of controlled mines, three-four meters from one to the other with functions essentially as an alarm and, at short range, a second line of pressure mines, interval of a meter. He was always dealing with having a greater density but also always inferior to necessary. In front of the strong point of the crossroad of el-Adem were buried numerous bombs (2,200 fragmentation of 12 kilos and 800 of 15 kilos) pervious transformation of the operation to pressure of the fuse, left from the units of the air force on the action of their departure for means deficiency of transport. As far as the antitank gun, the comprehensive availability numbered to 110 pieces:

of 37 mm. (from buried M tanks)	32
of 47/32 (22 guns drawn from the artillery depot)	43
of 65/17	13
of 75/27	11
of 75/40 (of the R. Marina)	1
of 77/28	10

Were provided with armor-piercing ammunition, but, only for guns of 37 and 47, as well as of 65/17 ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾.

Another factor that harmed much was the lack of air reconnaissance. The Command of the fortress did not have that in a couple of airplane, which could not exceed the perimeter of Tobruk but not only not built themselves on the same inner airport because of the continuous presence of the English fighters. So that the Command of the fortress can not to follow in depth the preparations of attack of the enemy who through insufficient and incomplete radio interceptions, limited land observation and most limited aerial observation. Above all may not to determine as it would have intentional the real objectives of contra-preparations, added to the information deficiency added the uniformity of the land, and therefore the impossibility to *a priori** localize the probable lines of departure of the attack, and mobility of the Australian and British troops that allowed them to only assume the alignment for the attack at the last moment and almost by surprise

*Latin = from the earlier or from what is before

About the opponent, it felt was a lack of detailed information. Few, in fact, were the survivors from Sidi el. Barrani and Bardia. For most of those who escaped were able too small to provide reliable data or they were found during the fight, too little tight contact with the attacker to be able to form a clear idea of the means and procedures tactical enemies. O'Connor was therefore liable to carry out against Tobruk (as before against Bardia and Sidi el-Barrani) a real surprise technique, especially regarding the use of the *Matilda*.

Last sore point, the reserve. The availability of an strong armored force was being a matter of the heavier deficiency was because on the basis of the only line of conduct in a position to assuring the resistance of the fortress. As already said, the defense of Tobruk substantially was founded on fire and only in minimal part on assault. The fire was asked to delay as much as possible the attack; the greater fire contribution was asked in order to demolish the attack. It was dealing with, in short, of "*a static defense and that only found probability succeeding in the timely, exact, effective fire reaction. No support could be had from our own air force, already completely absent from the sky of the Marmarica; some aid, towards sea, could be had from the fixed coastal defense of naval base*" ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾. The disproportion between objectives to strike and pieces available was too much strong. All the action of the artillery had to be exalted from the maneuver of fire. The observation and the connections were the hinges. Deficient and vulnerable both, the day of the battle will be first to suffer; the fluidity and the speed of penetration of the enemy medium armor will make the rest. The maneuver of the fire will remain endured without eyes and reins. Even in the few initial minutes, that they would have been necessary to them to direct themselves and taking part, the first enemy dash will cover the two kilometers more than sufficient for approach, piercing the perimeter town-walls and to spread towards the area of the batteries.

On 6 January, still before knowing the development of the battle of Bardia, Churchill had sent a note to the Committee of the Chiefs of the General Staff:

"1. The rapid destruction of the Italian Armed Forces in Eastern North Africa must be our first great overseas objective for the first months of 1941. Once the Italian army in Cyrenaica is destroyed, the Army of the Nile becomes available for

other tasks. We cannot still say what these tasks will be.

2. The fall of Bardia would allow the establishment of an advanced base for the conquest of Tobruk. With Bardia and Tobruk in our hands it would be possible to renounce nearly completely to the land communications with Alexandria and to count on marine transports for an further advance towards the West. Every hour we must slowly to stretch to the employment of the port of Tobruk until to its maximum ability.

3. The forces of attack to maintain to the West of Bardia and Tobruk it is not necessary that they be huge. The 2nd and 7th British Armored Division and the 6th Australian Division, the New Zealand group of brigades, that it will soon have to become a division, with perhaps or two British Brigades and with not more than 40-45,000 men, would have to be enough for having reason of the survivor Italian resistance and in order to take Benghazi. The distance from Tobruk to Benghazi along the coastal road is not much further than 400 kilometers, from the front at Alexandria approximately 600 to Tobruk. Therefore, once that Tobruk has been prepared as a base and that our land communications leave of there, our means of transport would not have to support a effort advanced to that current one and would have to be able to resume the advance from Tobruk as if Tobruk were Alexandria and to re-supply the modest but adequate force of necessary attack the goal. With the taking of Benghazi this phase of the Libyan campaign would be terminated.

4. The problem that arises is: how long will it take? Holding account of the serious Italian losses as far as the better troops, the motor vehicles and the equipment and of our naval supremacy, the collapse in Cyrenaica could be fastest. In truth, everything could be resolved at any time with a fast chipping. The need to make haste is evident. However, our overall strategy, could be enough to Benghazi, as both military and naval base, and all that lies to the east of the town was firmly in our hands on any day of the month of March.

13. Everything leads to the conclusion that a failure of the Greek offensive on Valona have very serious consequences. It may be that General Wavell, no other forces than those currently at its disposal in the Western Desert and despite some reduction in its air force, able to conquer Cyrenaica and Benghazi to settle in, but that would not be fair to Benghazi

to give up the chance that Greeks will take Valona (...). It is therefore necessary to envisage the possibility that after the capture of Tobruk further advanced towards the west of the army of the Nile may encounter serious obstacles. For me it is clear that aid for Greece must take precedence when the western flank of Egypt has been established (...)" ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾.

The same day the news that Bardia had fallen reached London and immediately Churchill reiterated his conviction to Gen. Ismay: in spite of the obvious necessity - he wrote - of pressing the Italians since the pursuit was easy, had to take in consideration the possibility to perhaps send to Greece another four or five squadrons of the *Royal Air Force* and a part of the 2nd Armored Division. "*Although it may be done, with a little 'luck and daring, we will be able to collect relatively easily the most coveted laurels on the Libyan coast, we must not lose sight even for an hour the huge importance of taking Vlora and keep standing opposite the Greek*" ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. The Joint Chiefs of Staff was, after all, agreed and on January 10 warned the commanders in the Middle East before the end of the month could begin a German intervention in the Balkans. Having to provide all possible help to the Greeks, after the capture of Tobruk the all the other operations on the Libyan theater had to pass to second place ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾.

In Cairo they were a bit puzzled. Wavell O'Connor had called and asked him what his intentions might touch after Tobruk. O'Connor while realizing that they can not take the fort by momentum, did not consider the problem too big: he knew in fact that compared to Bardia there were half men for a double front. So he was optimistic and said he considered the fall of Mechili very important because of the danger that would have immediately created on the flank and rear of Italian positions in the coastal strip of Dema. Wavell nodded, but would also discuss the possibility of a raid on Benghazi, assumptions on which there was already a short study: O'Connor declared himself more than favorable, while stating a preference for something more substantial than just a raid.

Receiving the directives from London, Wavell then replied – in agreement with Cunningham and Longmore -to believe the German presence in Romania only a ruse designed to stop the advance in Cyrenaica. He hoped, therefore, that the chiefs of staff would "*examine with the utmost urgency if the move enemy*

information received in London clearly contradicted any notion of "*move war of nerves* " or "*bluff* ", clarified and ordered:

"(...) 3. Nothing should prevent the capture of Tobruk, but as soon as this happened all operations in Libya are subject to aid for Greece; from the moment you receive this telegram you have to make all the arrangements for rescue Greece immediately up to the prescribed limits (...).

4. We expect and demand prompt obedience and active in our decisions, of which we take full responsibility. The visit for the occasion do in Athens will enable you to clarify the best way to implement the decisions referred to above. You should not delay it " ⁽¹⁷¹⁾.

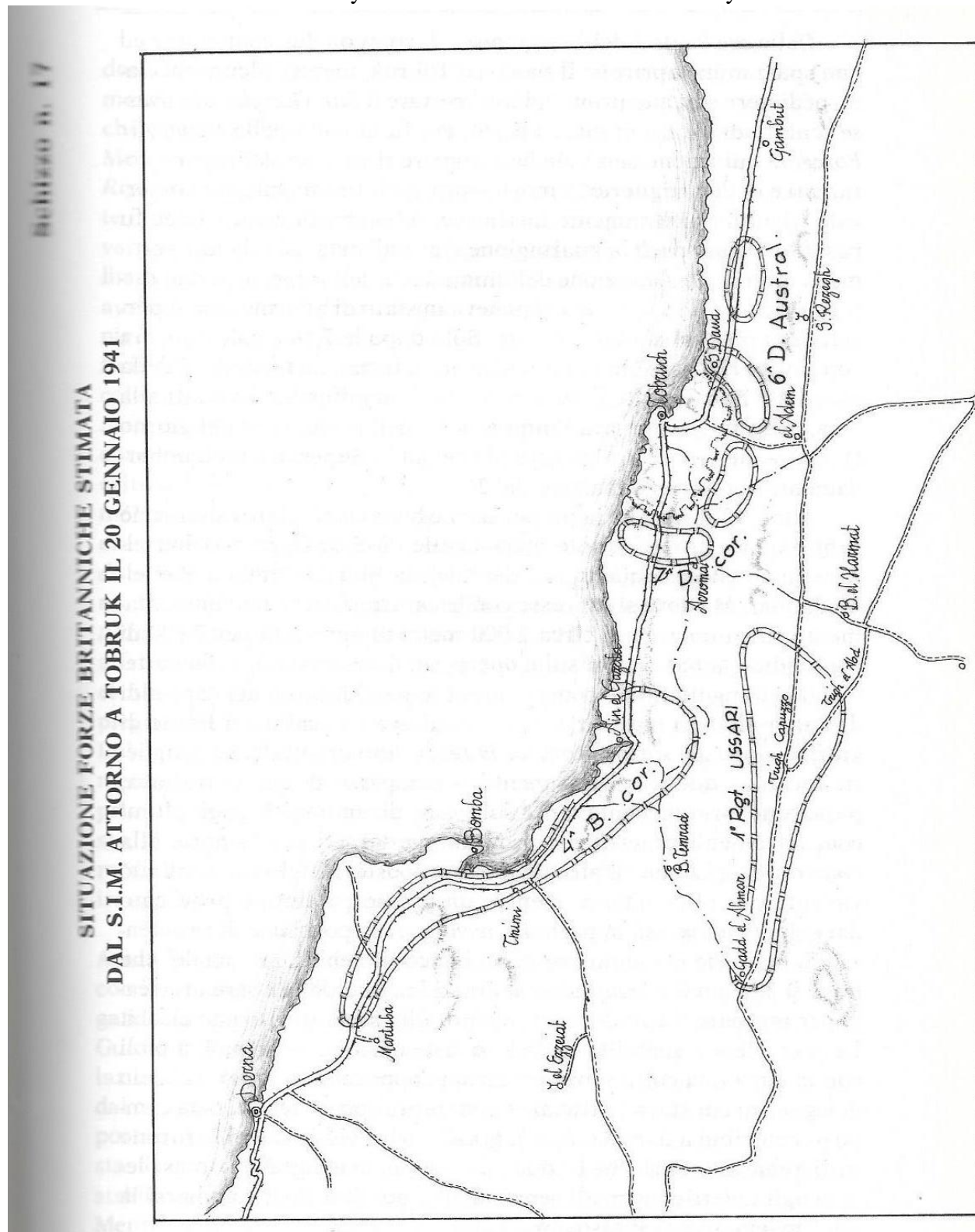
Wavell and Longmore went at once in flight to Athens in order to discuss with Metaxas and Gen. Papagos. On 15 January they reported, probably with satisfaction, that the Greek government was against the disembarkation in Thessaloniki of British units in dribs and drabs. Renouncing therefore to any participation being not less than a Corp of maneuver in a position to take at once the offensive. That being the case, on the 21st the Chiefs of General Staff communicated to Wavell the decision to continue the offensive until to Benghazi. This, if turned into strong naval base and air transport would allow the link-Cyrenaica Egypt by sea, relieving the immensely heavy cost of ground transportation. In exchange of the renunciation to reinforce Greece, but urged him to occupy the Dodecanese, and above all Rhodes, as soon as possible.

Meanwhile O'Connor was grappling with the logistics. It was not Tobruk as usual for the two Divisions, the 7th Armored and 6th Australian - which for reasons of distance could no longer support themselves respectively at Fort Capuzzo and Sollum - had already established the system of two new field depots (the n. 10 and n. 11) to seventy kilometers to the east from the fort. The point to be resolved, with an eye to the future, was the origin of supplies. In order to alleviate the task and responsibility, Wilson had given to Baggush advanced Command responsible for feeding XIII Corp and to the operation of the port of Sollum. The organization had revealed some shortcomings and O'Connor was convinced that it was appropriate for a future advanced have full control of the logistics of the port of discharge

of the supplying. He spoke to Wilson and took the occasion in order to point out Benghazi, but he remained astonished as soon as he knew that not only some program of merit did not exist, but a share of his means of transport probably would have been removed.

O'Connor requested at once clarifications from the Commander in Chief and Wavell, than while he had received the last directives from London, looked to Gambut to have resolved all the aspects of the issue. First of all Benghazi had to be considered an objective of a permanent occupation. As that, and contrarily to much thought from Churchill, the port of Bardia had not represented a great step forward in the solution of the logistic problem, Sollum would remained the main point of disembarkation (to the middle of January dealt with more then 350 tons per day and the end of the month more than 500) under the jurisdiction of Wilson, but whose provenance arrested at the Egyptian frontier. Once occupied, the port of Tobruk, could than be hoped to reached with infrastructures intact where the attack had been lead with the maximum speed, would be remained under the command of O'Connor as long as it had at least not been set aside such supplies to allow a minimum of autonomy with the Army Corps. This, finally, passed to the direct orders of Wavell.

Of the two Divisions being at hand, the 7th was not considered able to fight their way through a defense probably at a good level of organization, especially since the division was significantly weakened in previous fights. It was therefore decided to reorder and to entrust a part of the background to Tobruk to reserve them the advance of Mechili. Two regiments were withdrawn (8th *King's Royal Irish Hussars* and the 6th *Royal Tank Regiment*) and their means distributed between the other four regiments of the armored brigades. Once again the main role therefore was entrusted to the 6th Australian, robustly reinforced with nearly all that which the Army Corps had. The breach front was chosen at approximately six kilometers to east of the road for el-Adem. Through the breach would pass the 16th Brigade with the 7th *Royal Tanks* reduced to eighteen *Matilda* ⁽¹⁷²⁾, then the 17th Brigade (a battalion of which had to commit to order diversion Italian positions that barred the way to Bardia), finally the 19th Brigade. The pressure on all the rest of the perimeter walls was task of the Support Group of the 7th Armored to the north-west, from the road for Derna at Ras el-Medauar, and of the 7th Armored Brigade to the south-west, from Ras el-Medauar at the roadway for el-Adem (sketch n. 17).



From 00:00 to 02:00 hours on 12 January the *Terror* with two gunboats and a mine sweeper opened the fire on Tobruk, while some naval destroyer was ready to intercept the *San Giorgio*, if she had tried to exit into the open sea. Then it was the time for the *Royal Air Force*, whose action served also to cover the noise of the armor and the artillery units in motion. If the naval fire, not observed, turned out absolutely ineffective, the aerial bombardment was heavy. By now but the garrison was alert. From a week the feeling of the imminence of the attack was already alive, therefore every day at 04:30 the fortress was placed in state of alarm, with the personnel at their combat posts. Only after 07:30 at sun up, were they allowed to rest still some hour in turn. The incursions of the *Royal Air Force* carried out the 19th with launch of leaflets inviting the surrender, had emphasized the impression of approach of the D day, a lot that had been demanded from the Comando Superiore an aerial bombardment for the morning of the 21st.

At 05:40 the British preparations was unleashed. The shooting embraced at once nearly all the southern front from Sidi Daud to Dahar el Azazi and extended to that western one, from Sidi Cheiralla to Ras el-Medauuar. But where expressed with the characteristics of the annihilation was on an area of approximately 2,000 meters of amplitude for 7-800 of depth, demolishing the works, the observatories, and the batteries. The fatal rectangle comprised the inner parts of the Dahar el-Azazi and Bir Junes strong points and turned out to straddle the limit of jurisdiction of the subsectors A and B of the eastern field. The local artillery - two groupings - including what it was, passed, virtually seamless, from the last concentrations previewed from the program of the shooting for the night to the counter-preparation. The activity of the opposite artilleries continued violently for more than an hour, while a big fuss caused by the blows incoming and outgoing enveloped the position of strength and batteries as a huge bank of artificial smoke, that it even prevented the survey of the rockets launch from the works attacked for invoking the barrage. The observatories were blind. The precariousness and visibility of their arrangement - a peg pole with at peak at the top without protection or a small pylon of wood, on which was the observation officer with a field telephone - contributed to giving the fall of the shot: in short time they were all knocked out. So that the action of the groups of artillery remained tied to the normal objectives without some possibility to added to it there where more were needed.

Towards dawn the British fire went diminishing and dispersed, so much to allowed the hearing, from the front line works, the noise of medium armor in motion. In signaling to the Comando Superiore who just then had been rejected an attempt against Ras el-Medauar, Pitassi Mannella added: "*The situation remained calm. I repeated the absolute urgency of fighter participation*". But it was just within the specified time required to move the opposing artillery fire from the choice to break to the surroundings and deeper. In fact nearly at once the 2/3rd Australian Battalion, that under the shelter of the fire had moved following the pioneers, rushed to the assault. The overcoming of the obstacle was not difficult. It was dealing with only two rows of mines. As far as the wire, it was constituted from a single strip badly supported from small wood poles fixed in the rocky ground. The speed of execution, the still uncertain light, remain of the enormous cloud on dust on all the critical area, the sudden crisis caused in nearly the totality of the connections, were to the enemy as many factors of success. At 07:00 had produced to a gash more than a kilometer and eighteen *Matilda* advanced to the wake of the 2/1st Battalion, in the second group. Immediately the increase of the breach began: three *Matilda* turned to the left and joined the 2/3rd Battalion that were facing the works of Dahar el-Azazi and heading for the road of el Adem. Another three heavy tanks followed the 2/1st Battalion, that flanked to the right for the total elimination of the strong point of Bir Junes. For its part the 2/2nd battalion with nine *Matilda* pushed itself decidedly to the north for giving consistency and breathing the bridgehead. The first obstacle they met was the CV/25th artillery of 149/13. Then, seemed to appear an unexpectedly large tank, passed suddenly from the barrage to the direct firing until the *Matilda* burst into bits.

Even before the assault the Headquarters of the strong points of Dahar el- Azazi, Bir Junes and Suesi did not communicate m neither with the works it with the commands above. The artillery groups were no longer connected with neither observers nor the grouping commands. Linemen and couriers, runners remedy some to the disarticulation of the system of the transmissions, nearly all disappeared swallowed by the combat. The first news of the breakthrough was brought to the Central Command of the grouping by a returning motorcyclist So that Pitassi Mannella knew of the Australian advance towards 08:30- 08:45, when it was now established. While he ordered to search and to specify the contours of the penetration, he decided that all the artilleries in position for taking part to concentrate on

their fire in irruption area.. But, as we have seen, the lack of information and the difficulty of transmitting news made the conduct of the defense very difficult. One may wonder at this point, what was the real effectiveness of certain rules issued precisely for the possibility of slippages uncontrollable. In fact, prescribe a field of fire of 360 degrees for each weapon could not find literal comparison: at most resulted in assigning more areas of action or possible alternative plots. The fact is that in front of a situation that is completely dark every weapon, until it was hit, he had to remain linked to their field of fire appeared normal and when the enemy was too late: there was no time to change emplacement. It should be added that, similarly to what had happened in Bardia, the "strongholds" were very far from having a appearance which that currently, nor, also wanting, had the opportunity to implement the slightest hint of Ring of Fire impassable, at least on the front throat.

Towards 09:10 the 2/2nd Australian Battalion with a cavalry squadron had reached the roadway of Bardia, immediately to the east of Sidi Mahmoud, the 2/1st reached Sidi Daoud and the 17th Brigade, with the 2/6th and 2/7th Battalions (the 2/5th, on the outside, was engaging from south-east the strong point of Zeitun), had dragged the entire area comprised between the two localities. The works were taken by assault in groups of three or four at a time, maintained under the contiguous fire of artillery and preventing any cooperation between work and work. The little support of riflemen were swept up from first big waves of the attackers.

To the west a column with the 2/3rd Battalion, two companies of the I *Northumberland Fusiliers*, a horse battery and a squadron of cavalry, was next to the road for el-Adem. The fight in the area of the artilleries positions followed an unavoidable sequence: the medium armor followed closely by Australian companies headed for the flanks or the rear of the batteries, whose resistance - necessarily based on small arms for the close defense it could not be long against a mobile enemy and that appeared to arrive unexpectedly from a sand bank. Towards 10:30 on the southern section of the position of resistance from four strong points was being eliminated and hit from behind then silenced. The eastern field could be said completely disemboweled. They had been episodes of tenacious and unfortunate courage and others in which the speed of an unexpected assault or from more directions had the advantage on the promptness of reaction of the defense.

While, since 08:30 the 19th Australian Brigade had left the line of departure and now it was heading towards the heart of the fortress with its three battalions and a squadron of the 6th Cavalry, in the shelter made by mobile curtain from 78 guns that moved two hundred meters every two minutes. It was with knowledge that caused it to head at the strong point of the crossroad for el Adem-Bardia, probably the hardest bone, surely a nerve point. The first attempt was accomplished by the 2/2nd Battalion of the 16th Brigade to the extreme left of the III/69th Infantry. Overrunning the wing company, thanks also to the presence of a unit of tanks, the Australians eliminated the reinforcements, formed from a platoon of Camicie Nere, who tried to take back the position. Taken but under the anti-aircraft fire of the "Tordo" battery of navy, for the moment holding. Also because it was along sides the 19th Brigade, that being able to quickly attack astride the roadway for Bardia, supported very well from their own artillery. The III/69th was swept up after short fight and the participation of a company Bersaglieres and three M tanks in support (quickly destroyed) did not succeed to arrest the push. Little later the field Commander was captured. Pitassi Mannella telegraphed to Graziani:

"The Eastern Field already overwhelmed. Sporadic resistances in places. Western Field still not strongly engaged. The most serious situation. It is not possible to make up for the lack of reserves. Only forces available already engaged. Situation refers to 11:50 hours" ⁽¹⁷³⁾.

Graziani was impotent ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾. In balance to the Comando Supremo for the incessant aerial bombardment on Tobruk, he added:

"Continue without aviation. His Excellency Porro announced that he can not send bombers given impossibility protect them with fighters and therefore expose them to sure destruction. Numerical efficiency of fighters today at approximately 40 aircraft & as many bombers. Three CR.50 sent to Tobruk immediately overwhelmed"

It was now the turn of the semicircle of buried tanks, to whose support was coming a quick column of the reserve. It was an fierce and painful action and concluded with the massacre of the I/4th Infantry Tank and the LXIII Light Tank Battalion (70% of the officers fell, including the two battalion commanders, and 50% of the tank crews), much too easy prey to the medium armor and

enemy antitank guns. A share of the reserve still was not engaged. It had moved itself between the "Piave" strong point and that of hill 144, to remove them in some way to the incessant action of the *Blenheim*, and was ready to deliver a counterattack on the flank of the 19th Brigade. The moment arrived towards 13:00, as soon as the "Piave" strong point was invested. The initial action was positive since the Australian advance companies were arrested, but repetition of the attack by an element of greater force of the reserve destroyed without difficulty five of the seven M 11 tanks present and little later the rests were forced to yield.

Towards 16:00 the 2/8th Australian Battalion, reinforced with several *Matilda* and other units, moved against the "Pilastrino" while the 2/4th Battalion, supported by a tank unit, encircled the Command center of the fortress, situated in some shacks and in a cavern near by to the west of the former Fort Solaro. Command defended retreating slowly from the outside room inside the shelter in which were placed the General Staff and the center broadcasts. When the enemy, masters of the advanced vents, began to fling bombs in the corridors the irrespirable air of the gallery obliged the defenders to the yield. That was at 18:30. At the "Pilastrino" the combat was heated. Although two thirds destroyed, the strong point or rather its remains stood firm and the arrival of the night saw them still standing.

At the same time, from the road of Bardia they came down towards Tobruk units of the 6th Cavalry, which, received fire from of the *San Giorgio* and some batteries of the close defense of the city, attested itself close to the crossroad for Bardia and Derna. The elements of the 2/4th Australian Battalion came down then on the river of the bay, placing between the folds of the land, some 3 inch mortars and straddling the *San Giorgio*. The defense of the accesses to the town of Tobruk had been put into effect by a unit behind the town-walls, with automatic arms in correspondence of the south and the west doors. Losing the contact with every Command, Adm. Vietina, took the reins of the local organization. He had approximately 160 men drawn from the depot of the 116th Infantry and the frontier guard and from police officers and financial police. Moreover he had a small complement company and the sailors from the naval base. In truth the commander of the *San Giorgio* would have intended to try to escape from the port before that the fortress fell and the Comando Superiore Marina had favorable expressions, but Graziani was opposed for the obvious negative repercussions that the escape of the cruiser would have provoked on the moral of the defenders. It was decided therefore that the ship would

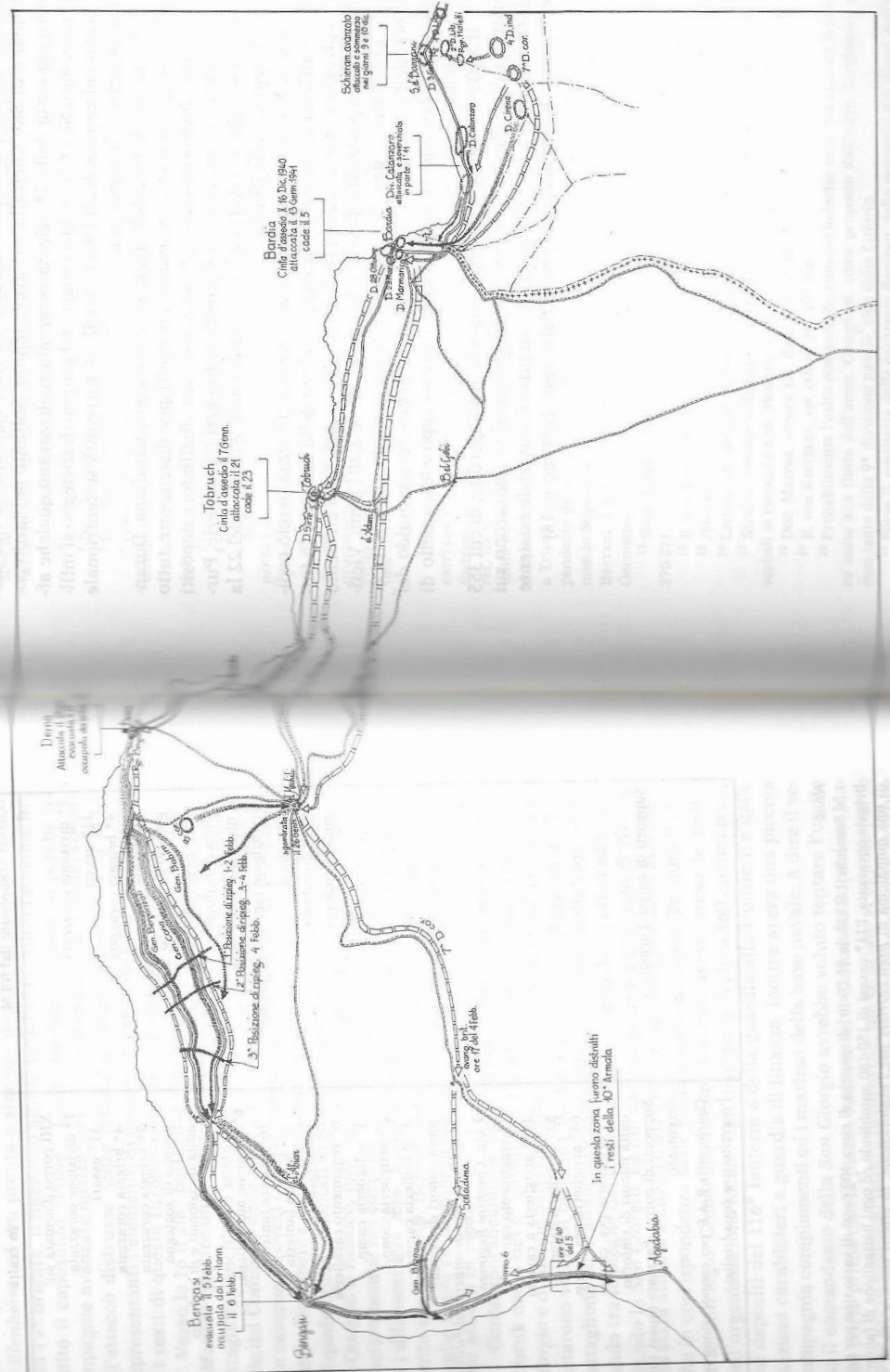
BRITISH FORCES ENGAGED IN THE ATTACK ON TOBRUK

supposed by the S.I.M.	in reality
7th armored division: 11th Hussars 4th armored brigade 7th armored brigade support group divisional units unit of reinforcements	XIII army corps with: 7th armored division: 11th Hussars 4th armored brigade 7th armored brigade support group & reinforcements
6th Australian division: three infantry brigades of four battalions divisional units units of reinforcements	6th Australian division: 16th infantry brigade 17th infantry brigade 19th infantry brigade 6th cavalry regiment 1st Field artillery 2nd Field artillery 3rd Field artillery smaller divisional units <i>I btg. Royal Northumberland Fusiliers</i> <i>I btg. Cheshire Regiment</i> 7th tank regiment 104th horse artillery 51st Field artillery 64th Heavy artillery 7th Heavy artillery smaller reinforcement units
army corps Support	army corps Support (nearly all put off center) R.A.F. Contingent for cooperation with the army (three squadrons).

Note: According to the S.I.M. the 7th Arm. Div. had approximately 400 tanks of various types for each Armored Brigade, the 11th Hussars with 150-180 armored car and each battalion of infantry fifteen or so Bren carriers for recon. In effects it seems that the 7th Arm. Div. had altogether 69 medium tanks and 126 light

Schizzo n. 18

**PRIMA OFFENSIVA BRITANNICA
DELLE OPERAZIONI 9 DICEMBRE 1940 - 7 FEBBRAIO 1941**



remain in combat verses the land as long as possible. Afterwards would sunk itself.

While the described events were carried out, the western field had been attacked from the outside between the strong points of Ras Medauuar and Sidi Cheiralla, but it had held. In the late afternoon units of the 7th Armored Brigade they only realized some encouragement at Sidi Cheiralla and units of the support group infiltrated into the strong point of Umm Chueil, to the northern extremity of the resistance position.

In the evening, more than half of the fortress was in Australian hands. Overnight they were developed projects to destroy everything that was not to be exploited by the enemy: distillers, fuel depots, ammunition and food, vehicles and artillery. Unfortunately, the design will not be implemented in that part. At 4:15 of the 22nd the *San Giorgio* was scuttled.

Gen. Mackay now knew he had the battle was won therefore ordered that the dawn of the 22nd the resuming of the advance of the division in all directions. There was more organized resistance. Each element of the fort remaining defended alone. At about 8.30 Adm. Vietina surrendered to Gen Robertson. A little later capitulated the Commander of the 61st *Sirte* Division in what remained of the strong point of Pilastrino. Around 16:00 surrendered the last stronghold, at Ras el Medauuar.

The British XIII Corps had little more than 400 losses, of which 355 were Australians. Those of the Italians, including prisoners went around 24,000 men, among which 2,000 sailors, with all the material existing in the fortress and not destroyed before the surrender (sketch n. 18)

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CHAPTER III NOTES

- 1 Keitel informed, in a confidential way, that to the end of the first phase of the offensive in the West the armored divisions had found to have loss approximately 50% of the tanks (destroyed or damaged) and other sensitive losses they had endured in the course of the operations on the Aisne.
- 2 Documentation of Gen. Marras (Doc. Marras), f.337/A dated 8.8.1940.
- 3 E. VON RINTELEN, op. cited, p. 96.
- 4 Doc. Marras, letter dated 3.9.1940 - appendix 44.
- 5 DSCSAS, f. 2425 dated 10.9.1940 of the S.M.R.E.
- 6 With the f. 01/841 of 24.9.1940 Graziani, convened at Rome for the 29th, specified the terms of the operating problem for the occupation of Marsa Matruh, his concluding realization would have been possible only to debit time, with all the unknown dangerous that the delay would have represented.
- 7 DSCSAS, f. 32/op. dated 25.9.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 8 Doc. Marras, f. 1793/A dates 25.9.1940.
- 9 According to von Rintelen, Mussolini "allowed to be persuaded by Hitler to accept for Libya an aeronautical body and one armored division. After that the German preparations began " (op. cited, p. 96).
- 10 DSCS, tele. 1885/A dated 10,10,1940. The preliminary study concerning the shipment of a armored division with a full organic load previewed as three weeks for the preparation, two weeks for rail shipments and another three for the marine transports with 28 Italian steamboats. These times naturally would be diminished for a reduced division.
- 11 Q. ARMELLINI, op. cited, p. 115.
- 12 The division would have been ordered on a recon group, a tank regiment with 120 tanks of 20 tons, an infantry regiment on two motorized battalions, a artillery regiment with two groups, a antiaircraft artillery regiment, a pioneers battalion and one radio, one squadron from recon and a services unit. Altogether 12.000 men. The transport from Naples to Tripoli was previewed in 45 days. At Naples a service of German boarding had to work, to Tripoli one German base. In Libya a German quartermaster, employed from the commander of the German troops in N.A., but would have been located near the supreme Commander, which would have delivered up a cured system of a advanced base at Sidi el Barrani. The provisions had to be supplied from Italy, fuel and ammunitions from the Germany.
- 13 BASIL LIDDELL HART, *Storia di una sconfitta*, Rizzoli, Milan, 2nd ed 1971, pp. 270-271.
- 14 E. VON RINTELEN, op. cited, p. 96.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Letter s.n. dated 31.10.1940 - Appendix 45.
- 17 oral Extract of the Innsbruck talks - appendix 46. For the complete text of the reports it is sent back by MOUNTAIN M., op. cited (pp. 167).
- 18 Doc. Marras, letter s.n. dates 17.11.1940.
- 19 E. VON RINTELEN, op. cited, pp. 107-108.
- 20 Probably the outcome would not be remained indecisive if the two *Littorio* had joined the fleet of Amm. Campioni, as proposed by Amm. Bergamini, commander of the 9th naval division, that is to say that of the *Littorio*.
- 21 Force B, constituted from the battleship *Renown*, the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, the light cruiser *Sheffield* and 12 naval destroyer.

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- 22 Present were the *Cavour*, the *Duilio*, *Littorio* and the *Vittorio Veneto* . The *Cirene* could not sortie for small damage; the *Doria* had to still complete training.
- 23 DCS, f. 2529 date 16,9,1940. Cfr. USM, op. cited, pp. 34.36 and A. JACHINO, op. cited, pp. 216-218.
- 24 DSCS, notes of the Chief of the G.S. General in dated 29.9.1940.
- 25 A. JACHINO, op. cited, pp. 222-225.
- 26 Ibid, pp. 228-229.
- 27 Ibid, p. 234 and seg.
- 28 The battleship *Barham*, the cruisers *Berwick* and *Glasgow* and three naval destroyer. The nocturnal passage of these ships through the channel of Sicily succeeded completely unnoticed by our disposition of control of the channel.
- 29 Perhaps also for this the aid that could be supplied from the R. Marina was considered with skepticism from both of the Armed Forces. On 9 December (the beginning of the English offensive) the Armed forces high command of R. Marina in Libya will answer to N. A. Quartermaster to have *authorized the study* circa the possibilities of supplying via sea Sidi el-Barrani and Marsa Matruh for the forces charged to proceed on this objective. For the present, however, that "*the supplying in examination introduce such difficulties not to allow to make their allocation sure in any case*" because of the adverse conditions of the sea in that season, of the characteristics of the coast and the imperfect cognitions of the shoreline. All that "*to depart from the control, irregular and constant, that on the disembarkation and traffic area the enemy will be able to carry out aero-marine Reconnaissance*" (DSCSAS f. 10650 dated 9.12.1940 from the R. Marina Supreme Commando).
- 30 DSCSAS, f. 42/op. dated 20.10.1940 of the Supreme Commander.
- 31 DSCSAS, f. 01/8934 dated 24.10.1940 of 10th army Command.
- 32 DSCSAS, f. f. 71 R.P. dated 17.11.1940 of the Supreme commander.
- 33 R. GRAZIANI, op. cited, p. 124. Gen. Spatocco, already commander of the *Cirene* Inf. Div., from had just replaced the Gen. Dalmazzo in the command of the XXI army corps. The command of the *Cirene* had been assumed by Gen. De Guidi.
- 34 DSCSAS, f. 01/2806 op. dated 27.11.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 35 On 21 November Berti had asked license one for fifteen days leave for reasons of health and family. On 25th departs for Italy after having given the deliveries to Gen. Gariboldi.
- 36 DSCSAS, f. 01/10266 dated 5.12.1940 of the 10th armed Commander - appendix 47. The sheet seems has reached in the hands of Graziani on 9 December (R. GRAZIANI, op. cited, p. 124), that is to say after a good four days. Such laps of time by him is incompressible and lack elements for any explanation. In any case the substance of the things does not change.
- 37 DSCSAS, f. Or 1/2763/p. dated 25.11.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 38 In appendix 48 the articulation of the forces in the Cirenaico-Egyptian theater. It was a matter altogether of 4,500 officials, 100,000 non-commissioned officers and troop, 1,100 antitank and antiaircraft pieces of field artillery.
- 39 *Report of the 5th Air Fleet activity in N.A. from 15 November 1940 to 5 February 1941, compiled by Gen. Porro.*
- 40 The situation naturally will be getting worse. In particular the aircrafts having to be in need of a major overhaul will not be able to be sent to Italy their accumulated near the S.R.A.M., inability to supply quickly.

- 41 W. CHURCHILL. Cited Op., p. 197.
- 42 Ibid, p. 198.
- 43 Was dealing with the 22nd brigade of infantry (Gen. Selby) was to become on 2 September the "garrison of Marsa Matruh" with various support units.
- 44 A Letter to gen. Dill (BARRIE PITT, *The Crucible of War, Western Desert 1941*, Cape, London 1980, p. 66).
- 45 Data drawn from PLAYFAIR, op. cited, vol. I, part II, CAP. XIII. In the period mid August-mid October the S.I.M. had calculated arriving in Egypt 132,000 men (see report in appendix 49).
- 46 It was thought that in the month of November Wavell had sent one division to Crete, two Australian or New Zealand regiments and various units to Greece and two divisions (one Indian and one Australian) in Palestine. Therefore the forces in Egypt would have quickly decrease to approximately 50,000 men. To fill the void there would be continual inflow imprecise but remarkable, transported by eight convoys for a total of 113 steamboats. After all, the English troops to the first of December it would have been brought back to the level of 260,000 men, equal to 14-15 divisions: five or six British ones, four Indian, three Australian-New Zealanders, one Polish, many various units equal to one division. To this the Egyptians could themselves have added two divisions.
- 47 According to a Dispatch of Gen. Wavell on the *Operations in the Western Desert* from December 7th, 1940, to 7th February 1941, sent to the War Office in May 1946 and published as a supplement to the *London Gazette* on 25 June 1946.
- 48 The tank for infantry Mk II, called *Matilda*, of 25 tons, was to classified at the time heavy. It was armed with a 40/53 gun in turret and one coaxial Besa 7.92 machinegun. Possessed a very robust armor (75 millimeter front and in turret, 47 millimeter lateral) not penetrable on part of the antitank pieces of the time and the robust protection to the crawler tracks. It moreover introduced the defects of a insufficient maneuverability, extreme slowness in varied terrain (approximately 10 km/h) and of insufficient power of two motors (altogether 190 CV).
- 49 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, CAP. XIV.
- 50 Considering the L tanks does not seem serious, I being able to compare them only with the *Bren carries* and the armored cars.
- 51 Sometimes the *Matilda* appears erroneously cited as "I" tank in place of "I" tank but where "I" the initial of infantry is not Roman number I, hence that is to say "infantry tank".
- 52 Such data supplied from Wavell in his report (than but indicate 31.000 men approximately). According to the report written by O'Connor to Sulmona 24 April 1941 a little after his capture near El Mechili - and addressed to the American military attache in Rome, Col. Fiske, the figures are different. That, for obvious reasons, cannot believe the text, however they specify that of the 7th Arm. Div. which had 75 tanks that were *heavy* and that among the supplementary troops of the army corps (that is to say not framed in the two divisions, 7th Armored and 4th Indian) existed the 7th tank regiment with 48 infantry tanks, a medium tank regiment and one of heavy tanks. Finally, the consistency of the 7th Tanks normally is indicated from English part as 50 *Matilda*, in round numbers. In truth the regiment was ordered on one command sqd. (with four *Matilda* and seven Mark VI B) and three tank squadrons, each with a platoon command (a *Matilda* and two *close support*) and five tank platoons with three *Matilda* each. In total, therefore, 65 tanks, of which 52 were *Matilda*.
- 53 J. Connell, op. cited, p. 288. Gen. Creagh was the commander of the 7th armored division.

54 Report of Gen. Gallina.

55 Among other things, the communications between the XXI Corp Command and the Maletti grouping in practice were limited to those r t. radios. In fact, the telephone link had to pass through the telephones exchange of the *Cirene*, Bug Bug, the Libyan divisions group and the 2nd Libyan: very difficult in period of operating stasis and impossible during action.

56 Report of Lt. Col. Carmine Giuffrida, chief of the general staff of the grouping.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid

59 Report of Gen. Gallina.

60 The 11th Indian brigade were constituted from the *Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders* battalion, from the I/6th *Rajputana Rifles* and the IV/7th *Rajput* Regiment. The division artillery was constituted from the 1st, 25th and 31st field artillery and from the 3rd horse artillery. Departing from the characteristics from the tanks and of the guns, the force ratios between defense and attack were therefore: 1 to 1 for the infantry, 1 to 2 for the tanks and 1 to 3 for the artillery.

61 The sudden almost elimination of the M Tank battalion has been taken from a British source, and verified from Italian commentators, as concurred from absolute surprise endured by a unit still awaiting with the first operations at daybreak. In truth the things went various.

Since 05:30 Gen. Maletti had personally ordered Maj. Campanile, commander of the battalion, that was ready to move. At 06:45 all units were informed of the probability that, after the demonstrative skirmishes of the night, the true attack was pronounced on the southern front of the strong point. In particular, the tank battalion was specified that its participation should occur by initiative, according to the development of the events.

Towards 07:30 Maj. Campanile, approval the concentration of the *Matilda* for the onslaught to the throat front, decided to counterattack with the companies in column. Since, the tanks lacked radios, the order were given with the prescribed small flags. The 1st company was about to obey but the 2nd did not notice of the signaling. The commander of the battalion stopped the movement and, returned with just the command tank, come down to earth in order to speak with the commander of the 2nd company. In that moment the English attack was announced. Maj. Campanile, still to earth, as nearly all the staff of the 2nd company, was taken in full chest from a burst of machine-gun fire (from the report of the chief of general staff of the grouping).

62 Report Gen. O'Connor. Instead according the official history of the Playfair the six tanks were damaged by a mined field after the occupation of Nibea. Liddell Hart door to seven such tanks (*The tanks*, II vol., London 1959).

63 B. LINDELL HART, op. cited, p. 45.

64 Towards 09:00 Gen. Maletti momentarily went away from the command post to go to, a meeting with two officials, at the equipped truck, close to his own awning, that he usually used also as an observatory. He stopped for a few minutes then, seen the impossibility to return to the command post - though distant of hardly fifty meters - headed off at the run with the two officials towards two 47/32 guns of the north field. In the moment in which by he hand indicated to the gun layers the English tank moved more closer, another *Matilda*, exited without warning from the bank of smoke and powder smoke, it was adorned making fire on him from one score of meters. Hit in full chest from a projectile, Maletti fell struck dead. The general came buried on the place to the cure of the English.

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- 65 On the 9th, in Cairo, Wavell convened with seven or eight war correspondents. When they arrived received them in his study and he said: "*Gentleman, I have asked you to come to me this morning because you know that we are attacking in the western desert. It is not a true offensive and I do not think for the moment that you must describe it as such. You could call it a raid on immense scale. The attacks are to begun in the first hours of this morning and now news arrives to me that the first one of the Italian entrenched camps has fallen. At this time I cannot say where our push ends: it depends on the provisions and the ammunitions that we will succeed to capture and on the benzine that we will find. I wanted communicate this news because you can control*" (Alan Moorehead, *La guerra del deserto*, Garzanti, Milan 1968, p. 31).
- 66 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 268. Wavell and O'Connor do not supply figures. Liddell Hart indicates approximately 4,000 prisoners (op. cited, p. 45), number absolutely unreliable since greater than the force present in the strong point.
- 67 Called by the English "Point (X)".
- 68 Alam el-Tummar west.
- 69 the 5th Indian brigade was constituted from the I *Royal Fusiliers*, from the III/1st *Punjab Regiment*, from the IV/6th *Rajputana Rifles*. Held account of the artillery support, compare of force between defense and attack at Tummar west was of 1 to 1 for the infantry, 1 to 3 for the artillery and 0 to 45 for the tanks.
- 70 News from Indian source.
- 71 DSCSAS, tele 01/3202 op. dated 9.12.1940, 16:40 hours. It is not clear "*order Confirmed*" circa resistance in place of the 1st Libyan. If he was reiterating an order already given by the Commander of the army, does not explain the "*nothing in contrary*" of Gariboldi telephoned from Giuliano. If instead, it repeated previous just an order, it lacks description.
- 72 After the occupation of Sidi el-Barrani the command of the XXI army corps had been assumed by Gen. Spatocco, replacing Gen. Dalmazzo, who returned to Italy.
- 73 The Selby group was constituted from the II *Coldstream Guards* battalion, one company of the *Northumberland Fusiliers*, one of the *South Staffordshire Regiment* and one of the *Cheshire Regiment*, a detachment of the *Durham Light Infantry*, a platoon of the 7th Hussars and some batteries.
- 74 B. Pitt, op. cited, p. 115.
- 75 G. CLANO, op. cited, pp. 486-487.
- 76 The *Cirene* had to abandon, for insufficiency of motor vehicles and lack of tractors, the 100 mm. guns of the battery from of the 12th artillery, those of the 77 mm. battery from the guard to the frontier and a battery from the III group of 75/27 of the 21st army corps artillery grouping, reinforcing the division.
- 77 The II/142nd located at Bir Oasis would have had to move, for order of the XXI Corps Command, to Iluet Abn Mazhud "*for more tighten the connection with the Cirene*". The provision, then, did not have performance. To notice that Iluet Abn Mazhud is more distant in air line by 10 kilometers from Alam Samalus (strong point to the south of the *Catanzaro*) and 16 kilometers from Sofafi (strong point closer to the *Cirene*).
- 78 The 7th armored brigade had the 1st *Royal Tanks*, the 3rd and 8th Hussars. Moreover it was reinforced by two regiments of artillery.
- 79 From the report of Gen. O'Connor.
- 80 R. GRAZIANI, op. cited, p. 137. A good outline the facts he is right to specify that the *Catanzaro*, arrived in Ubia on the eve of the war with the two regiments of infantry: this was completed slowly in place. To the baptism of the fire the division was to its forth commander in six months: Gen. Nicholas Spinels, with which it was join in Africa; Gen. Giuseppe Stefanelli; Gen. Lorenzo Mugnai, replaced in September, and Gen. Giuseppe Amico, that he had assumed the command in November.

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- 81 The morning of the 9th the last two battalions moved from Sidi el Barrani. The convoy was surprised by means of English light armor and endured losses.
- 82 At the defense of Sidi Ornar it came destined a militia battalion variously reinforced and a group howitzers of 100/17 with two batteries.
- 83 DSCSAS, tele. 013318 op. dated 12.12.1940, 10:30 hours.
- 84 G. CIANO, op. cited, p. 487.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid p. 488.
- 88 DSCSAS, 200.000 tele dated 12,12,1940.
- 89 DSCSAS, f. 01/3322 op. dated 12.12.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 90 DSCSAS, 200.100-1 tele dated 13.12.1940, 13:25 hours .
- 91 The provision, place in relation to the cited danger, can provoke perplexity. The same Graziani felt the need of ask the High supreme command: "*Last Days in fact a formation armored car was introduced to the front coming from Augila-Gialo from the Egyptian oases of Dakla aut Siwa that it demonstrates that exists in that area a suitable organization at to carry out what could appear improbable* " (tele. 01/3392 op. dated 15 Decembers).
- 92 DSCSAS, tele 01/3363 op. dated 14.12.1940 of the Armed forces high command.
- 93 DSCSAS, tele 01/5550 op. dated 14.12.1940 of the 10th Army Command.
- 94 F. 1 Ris. Pers. dated 14.12.1940, from R. Graziani, op. cited, p. 147.
- 95 DSCSAS, 162925 tele. 162924 and dated 15.12.1940, 11:35 hours. The previous day Mussolini had telephoned to Tirana and made Cavallero current of the events on the Egyptian frontier. With the occasion having indicated the "*choice line for defense*": presumably the line of Sidi Omar -fort Capuzzo- Halfaya. Cavallero, also "*by rough estimate* " and with the mind to the most delicate situation in Albania, expressed negatively: "*I Disapprove and say that he must make line further back*" (UGO CAVAILERO, High supreme command, Cappelli, Bologna 1948, p. 23).
- 96 DSCS, tele. 4688/op. dated 15.12.1940, hours 18:30.
- 97 DSCS, tele. 01/3392 op. dated 15.12.1940, hours 23:30 of the Armed forces high command.
- 98 DSCS, tele. 01/3394 op. dated 15.12.1940, hours 23:30 of the Armed forces high command.
- 99 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 273. Wavell provided different figures: 133 dead men, 387 wounded and 8 missing and declared 38,000 prisoners, 400 guns of all the types and about fifty tanks.
- 100 A.P. WAVELL, cited Despatch, pp. 3264-3265.
- 101 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 272.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 DSCS, tele. 4574/op. dated 10,12,1940: "*Your telegrams give an idea of the amplitude and violence of the enemy attack on me, but the confidence that I have in you is such to make me believe that in spite of the initial success of the enemy, you will re-establish the situation. They are sure that you will make to use aviation in mass, especially if time propitious and will be for the entire day. Be also sure that you will have already given to General Gallina and to the solid troops that garrison Sidi Barani order to resist at all costs*".
- 104 R. GRAZIANI, op. cited, p. 137.
- 105 G. SANTORO, op. cited, p. 303.

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- 106 O'Connor asserted in his report: "The tanks behaved magnificently. The entire plan depends on their success (...)".
- 107 Gen. Fuller observed that the 10th Army was *"formidable in effectives"* but in reality very weak *"not only because was not very well equipped of materials and mechanized means, but also because his tanks were probably the most insignificant of Europe"*. And, still: *"A correct claim that Mar. Graziani attributed the own a unrivaled crushing superiority of the tanks. They were much Superior!..."* (J.F. FULLER, *La guerre mécanique*, Berger Levrault, Paris 1948, p. 186 and 189).
- 108 R. GRAZIANI, op. cited, pp. 141-142.
- 109 DSCSAS, tele 01/3390 op. dated 15.15.1940, 21.30 hours.
- 110 DSCSAS, tele 01/3396 op. dated 15.12.1940, 23:30 hours.
- 111 DSCSAS, tele 01/3406 op. dated 16.12.1940.
- 112 DSCSAS, tele 01/3408 op. dated 16.12.1940, 04:00 hours .
- 113 DSCSAS, f. 3 R.P. dated 17.12.1940 of Supreme commander - Appendix 50.
- 114 DSCSAS, tele 4 R.P. dated 18.12.1940 of Supreme commander - Appendix 51.
- 115 DSCS, f. 345 Segr. dated 13.12.1940 of the undersecretary of the G.S. of the Army.
- 116 M. MONTANARI, op. cited, CAP. II.
- 117 Doc. Marras, f. 2455/A dated 14.12.1940 directed to the Ministry of the War, Cabinet.
- 118 After the talk with von Brauchitsch, von Rintelen had been introduced to Halder, Chief of the G.S. of the army, asking for be replaced as military attache to Rome. Halder answered that he would look for his successor, but the course of the events evidently put in various light the relationships with von Rintelen.
- 119 E. VON RINTELEN, op. cited, p. 109.
- 120 Doc. Marras, f. 2501/A dated 18.12.1940 directed the Ministry of the War, Cabinet. In the Marras letter he specified that between the causes of the Italian checkmate the Germans enumerated the insufficiency of organization and training of the troops.
- 121 DSCSAS, tele 4768/op. dated 18.21.1940.
- 122 Regarding a marginal observation: that the M 13 tanks available were sent ones with urgency *"by order of the Duce"* Sound bad. The chief of the General Staff did not have sufficient authority to order to supply them directly?
- 123 DSCSAS, tele 4816/op. dated 20.12.1940 of the High supreme command.
- 124 DSCSAS, tele 4819/op. dated 20.12.1940 of the High supreme command: *"For his Excellency Graziani. In his daily speech the English Prime Minister has reportedly said: "it cannot be said that the Italians have demonstrated to possess a high combative spirit nor high quality. In other periods of the Italian history there are many beautiful examples of great courage. However it is, as we have seen the performance of entire Italian divisions lay down their arms, of the front line forces by far inferior & the activity of our crushing aviation in conditions of inferiority, often the relationship was of 5 to 1 to our Disadvantage, has always been crowned with success". "That Command must sent to me a declaration that refute these free slander & declarations. It is necessary for the truth of facts & our prestige"*.
- 125 DSCSAS, Tele. 01/3686 dated 21.12.1940, 13:00 hours. Appendix 52.
- 126 DSCSAS, Tele. 16/6042 op. dated 22.12.1940, 19:45 hours.
- 127 DSCSAS, f. 01/10599 dated 16.12.1940 of 10th Army Command - Appendix. 53.
- 128 DSCSAS, Tele. 01/3454 op. dated 17.12.1940, 12:00 hours - Appendix 54.
- 129 Cited f. 2023 op. dated 23.7.1940 - Appendix 18.
- 130 DSCSAS, f. 01/10623 dated 18.12.1940 10th Army Command - Appendix 55.

- 131 R. GRAZIANI. Cited Op., p. 173.
- 132 W. CHURCHILL. op. cited, p. 315.
- 133 Ibid, p. 316-317.
- 134 Ibid, p. 317.
- 135 In the incursions of the period cited the English calculated not less than 44 aircraft destroyed or damaged on the ground; the per diem historian of the 5th air fleet indicates 17 aircraft hit at Benina (18 December), 21 at Castel Benito (21 December) and 8 still at Benina (22 December) for total 4 airplane out of service, 8 with serious damages and 32 repairable ones in the fleet.
- 136 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 283.
- 137 ENZO MURRONI, *Bardia*, Castaldi, Milan 1958, pp. 100-101.
- 138 DSCSAS, f. I/Ris. Pers. Dated 1.1.1941 of the Supreme commander - Appendix 56.
- 139 On the date of 1 December there existed in Libya:
- the I and II battalion of the 4th infantry tank regiment with 74 M tanks on strength;
 - the III/32nd infantry tanks with 37 - M 13 tank on strength;
 - seven light tank battalions with 309 tanks on strength.
- 140 On 10 Decembers the 1st armored regiment "Aresca", from the name of the commander, constituted from the I/4th tank and the XXI light tank battalion, received the order of move immediately from Marsa Lucch, where it was waiting, to Bardia. Two days were very necessary in order to carry out the transfer of 25 kilometers and on arrival it was necessary to abandon all the trailers and the materials not of ready to employ. On the late afternoon of the 13th Col. Aresca received new orders to go at once to Tobruk. To the regiment they were given all the equipped units of the armored brigade of motor vehicles slow and unserviceable but tow able . The march was completed in approximately eighteen hours, exceeding the night, large difficulties for the assembly, abandoning other materials, forming strange trailer trucks with towing tractors five-six vehicles damage and rejecting in the usual attacks of the English usual armored car (two of which they captured).
- Arriving at Tobruk the grouping literally was based. Succeeding to with difficulty still sending five medium tanks in a position to move to Ain el-Gazala in order to defend that airfield. All the rest, tanks and motor vehicles were in damage.
- 141 the battalion was jointed at Mechili with only three tanks. The others arrived in three or two small group within seven hours.
- 142 The 5th fleet Per diem historian , f. 3988/op. dated 20.12.1940.
- 143 F. 48 R.P. dated 21.12.1940 from the 5th fleet commander.
- 144 In the Italian army, until 1976, in order to indicate the units they used, in alternation, Arabic numbers and Roman numbers: Arabic for the uneven levels (Squad, company, regiment, division, Army) and Roman for those even (platoon, battalion, brigade, army Corps). In the Anglo-Saxon armies instead it has always been employed the Arabic numeration for the units of whichever rank (except the company, defined with a letter of the alphabet), even if in the Italian text, like in the present monograph, he prefers himself, for habit, to indicate the battalions with the number Roman. The adoption of X the I for the army corps with O'Connor was an intentional tear to the rule.
- 145 the indication of the Australian battalions deserves a clarification. The Australian units were mobilized by battalion. They, framed in brigades, conserving the acquired traditions of the first world war to Gallipoli and in France. Therefore, as an example, they were indicated like 2/1 in order not to designate the II battalion of the 1st regiment, on the contrary the I battalion mobilized for the 2nd time; as the 1/12th designated the 12th mobilized battalion for the time.

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- 146 According to some reports small-caliber divisional guns and of the frontier guards distant from the obstacle 1000-1500 meters.
- 147 DSCSAS, tele. 01/344/op. dated 9.1.1941, 20:00 hours.
- 148 DSCSAS, f. 2 Ris. Pers. dated 6.1.1941 - appendix 57.
- 149 The *Ariete* had three light tank battalions, but it was efficient, well organized and trained well. It seemed in a good position to already absorb the medium tanks in Libya or en course of shipment.
- 150 The Trento was organic full loaded and efficient .
- 151 DSCS, note for Mussolini dated 4.1.1941.
- 152 DSCS, note for Mussolini dated 7.1.1941 - appendix 58.
- 153 Demand introduced to the High supreme command at 12:30 of 7 January.
- 154 DSCS, memorandum dated 8.1.1941 - appendix 59.
- 155 DSCS, tele. 5291 op. dated 9.1.1941.
- 156 W. CHURCHILL, op. cited, p. 394.
- 157 Ibid, pp. 406-409.
- 158 Ibid, part 111, vol. I, p. 25.
- 159 DSCSAS, f. 3 R.P. dated 9.1.1941 of the supreme commander.
- 160 DSCSAS, tele 01/440/op. dated 11.1.1940, 19:00 hours.
- 161 The X C.A.T. was constituted from two bombing groups with 32 He.111, two dive-bombers groups with 54 Ju. 87, two fighter squadrons with 24 Me. 110 and one squadron of strategic reconnaissance with 10 Ju. 88.
- 162 At the same time repatriated the residual personnel of the 50th assault Stormo, by now lacking in apparatuses, and was joined with the 114th Bombing group to great radius for lack of S.82, dispatched to Italy for motor change.
- 163 In any case, the debut of the cooperation between the allies was not happy. In the afternoon of 15 January they were introduced to Benina, seems without warning, two Ju. 88 in order to complete a reconnaissance in the area of the Delta and the canal. Departing at dawn of the 16th, one caught fire in departure and the other did not return. In the afternoon there arrived new He. 111 (and the following morning an other Ju. 88) that as a result of a new reconnaissance, decided to carry out a offensive action in the night of the 18th in spite of adverse the atmospheric conditions. These evidently had been underrated and, for more, the German pilots also did not think such Italian collaboration offered necessary, given the particular ambient, a single He. 111 returned to the base and the others lost and were reduced to forced landings. They were traced in three days by means of Italian aerial and land searches.
- 164 Per diem historian 5th air fleet, f. 259 R.P. dated 10.1.1941 of the Chief of general staff of the Air Force.
- 165 The arms drawn from the artillery warehouse amounted to some thirty of rifle machine guns, 254 Fiat 35 machine-guns, 41 mortars of 45 mm., 12 mortars of 81 mm., 22 pieces of 47/32 and eighteen gun of 65/17 to 149/35. Moreover there was recuperated from the unserviceable aircraft a score of cal. 7.7 machine-guns and a some thirty cal. 12.7, than but alias most insufficient operating jamming with frequency after only a few rounds per burst, being air cooled and constructed for the employment at high altitude and high velocity. What's more these arms lacked tripod and the device for the continuous shooting outside from the onboard installation. It was provided with means of circumstance without but much success.
- 166 The morning of 21 January were available the following anti-tank ammunitions : 1000 rounds for guns of 37 mm. equal to 30 rounds per gun; 17,500 rounds for 47 mm. guns equal to 400 rounds per gun (projectiles of the original type, therefore not very effective ones); 2,000 rounds per gun for 65 mm. equal to 150 rounds per gun.

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- 167 Report of gen. Carlo Rostagno, already chief of G.S. of the XXII army corps.
- 168 W. CHURCHILL, op. cited, pp. 24-28.
- 169 Ibid, p. 34. the
- 170 The Chiefs of general staff authorized the shipment to Greece, to the maximum, of one squadron of Matilda, a regiment of cruisers, ten regiments artillery and five squadrons of aircraft.
- 171 W. CHURCHILL, op. cited, p. 38.
- 172 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 291. Wavell speaks about 16 tanks and Liddell Hart takes for good the Wavell report.
- 173 The reliabilities of the situations communicated from the XXII Corps Command and the subordinate Commands are uncertain, in as far as cause of the information difficulty and of communication often the hour references alone indicate the moment in which a Command is acquired with the acquaintance of a determined event.
- 174 If before the attack the Armed forces high command thought around Tobruk only 7th Armored and 6th Australian, the coming from disastrous news from the fortress he made to think present also other divisions in flowing quickly from the frontier area. Therefore the telegram can only be explained 01/904/op. that at noon of the 21st Graziani sent to the High supreme command: *"the enemy Forces that are developing attack against the fortresses therefore it is estimated: Australian Anzac Corps with three divisions with least two long range heavy artillery regiments thrown in as reinforcements. Armored Corps comprising two armored divisions reinforced by artillery & engineer elements coming from other units. Motorized brigade French. Land forces were supported by the fleet & from all Egypt aviation"*.

Chapter Four

THE ITALIAN RETREAT IN CYRENAICA**1. FIGHTING ON THE DERNA-MECHILI LINE**

From Tobruk to Derna there are 170 kilometers without any major Operative obstacle. The pass of el-Gazala, that it interrupts the coastal axis rising to a hundred of meters on the bay having the same name, does not have breath nor depth and is easy tunable to the south. From Derna to Benghazi there are 243 kilometers of road. The coastal route is developed along the via Balbia that crosses the Cyrenaican *gebel* and flows therefore in to the plain to the north of Benghazi. From Lamluda (the west of Berta) until to Barce follows two roadways: northern *gebelica*, for Beda Littoria, and southern *gebelica*, for Slonta and Maraua. A railway line linking Barce to Benghazi.

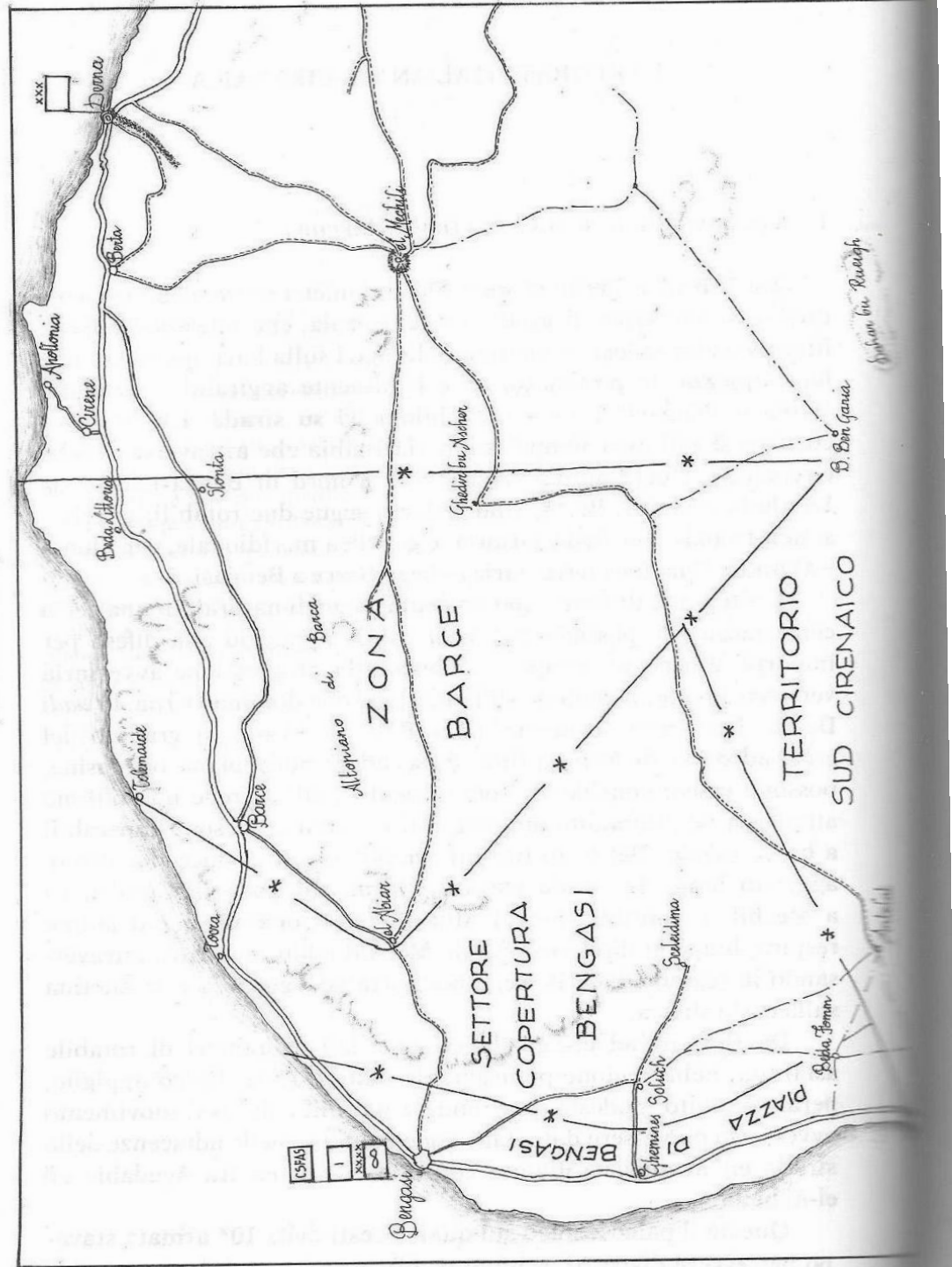
The plateau of Barce does not introduce natural obstacles of a sure consistency that can be of valid support to the defense in order to at least impose a time of delay to the enemy progression towards the West: the escarpment on the plateau that dominates Derna, the *Wadi Derna*, the uneven land between Barce and Slonta, the pass of the *gebel* to the West of Barce before coming down in the Benghazi plain, can be considered only local obstacles, since it does not offer breath nor appreciable depths and, however, they are surmountable at short radius. The plateau of Barce no natural obstacles of a certain size that could be of valuable support to defense to at least impose a stopping time to progression opposing westward: The ridge on the plateau overlooking Derna, the *Wadi Derna*, the rugged terrain between Barce and Slonta, the step of *gebel* west of Barce before going down in the Benghazi plain, they can be considered only local obstacles, why not offer a breadth or depth and appreciable, however, can be overcome in the short haul. Besides all the Cyrenaica cape can be bypassed along the road from Tmimi, the Gulf of Bomba, goes to Mechili and continues to el-Abiar Benghazi or, broader, along the route that Mechili alleges in Msus, crossing the Balte region, and then leads to Ajdabiya and ez Zuetina on the Sirtica coast.

From Benghazi to el-Agheila there are 280 kilometers of asphalt road, in the flat region of Sirtica. Only lifeline, however, very modest, to make it more difficult to move opponent may be given by Wetlands adjacent to the road and in the sand dunes in the area between Ajdabiya and el-Agheila.

This the Stage on which the remainder of the 10th Army was to be destroyed (sketch n, 19).

Schizzo n. 19

L'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLA CIRENAICA OCCIDENTALE
(23 GENNAIO)



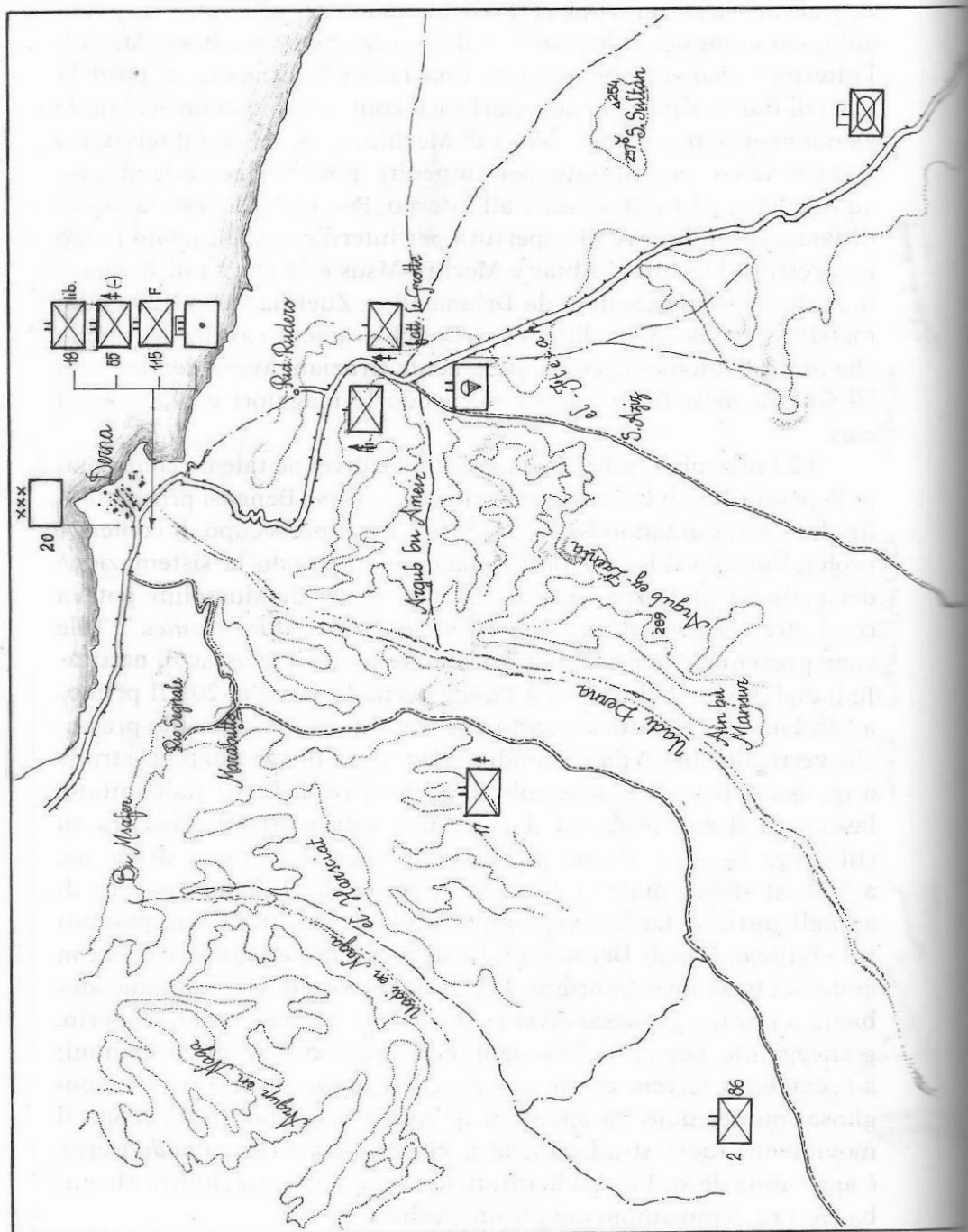
In little more than a month, the organization of the western Cyrenaica had assumed a certain appearance. One advanced alignment, with the task to arrest on the Derna-Berta-Mechili positions further advancing of the British. One intermediate strip: to north of the zone of Barce, destined to absorb the repercussion of an eventual breakthrough in correspondence of Mechili; to south the territory south- Cyrenaica, organized in order to prevent possible thrusts direct to Agedabia and infiltrations from the inside. Then, more to the west, the defense of Benghazi: a covering sector for penetrations towards Mechili-el Abiar and Mechili-Msus and the city of Benghazi, in truth the coastal strip from Driana to ez Zuetina (approximately 120 kilometers) depth of 25-30 kilometers. The advanced alignment, what imprudently and emphatic Graziani had called "*the Grappa of the Libya*", was receiving greater and the more urgent care.

On 23 December, when the situation became such that confirm the ability of advanced British proposed to Benghazi since 15 to the Supreme Commander, Graziani was anxious to give depth to the defense of Cyrenaica accelerating the installation of the ridge of Derna, what to believe Mussolini could be "the zone of permanent cessation of the enemy advance". This area has as dominant feature two natural obstacles: the ridge of the plateau and the *wadis* Derna (sketch n. 20). The first, to trend equatorial, high two to three hundred meters, in profile almost vertical, cut into by deep *uidian*, forbids the transit out of the way to any type of motor vehicle; It is a gunshot from the town, leaving between his foot and the sea a narrow coastal strip on which the city stands. His tenure means the domain of Derna, south-east of which lies the plain of el-Ftejah, poor footholds tactical and easily controlled by observers planted on the embankment. The *wadis* Derna and a deep ditch, steep-walled, with southwest-northeast trend. Divide the region of Derna into two morphologically very different: in the east, the land united, open, flat, viable in every sense also from common vehicles; to the west, broken terrain, covered with tree line or bush, punctuated by spikes of solid rock that prevent the movement astray also tracked. Moreover the *wadis* Derna is to circumvent the south along the easy practicability Martuba-Berta and, on a larger scale, by Mechili.

Derna, to the contrary of Bardia and Tobruk, did not possess a fortified perimeter; around the old city existed a wall only, the forts "Rudero" and "Piemonte" with the eastern ridge and the fort

Schizzo n. 20

LE DIFESE DEL SETTORE DI DERNA (23 GENNAIO 1941)



"Lombardy" on the left bank of the Derna *Wadi* with some element of a wire. The constructions of these works in masonry, made for war operations against the Arabs, repaired hardly for rifle fire. After the beginning of the British offensive, pressure of the events and the lack of material and labor for construction, had simply allowed quick battlefield works. Instead the army engineer corps had put in action the road interruptions on the Via Balbi, the mined types in correspondence of the two embankment, and minefields in correspondence of the crossroad for el-Fager and in the zone of F.te Mara.

The defensive system, if it could be called that, considered the following breakdown: the stronghold of Derna on the coast; line of the *Wadi* Derna; a minefield of six kilometers but of low density at the top of the loop where the *wadi* Derna took the name of *wadis* Beddahach; the strongpoint of Berta, back, to which access from the south-east was closed by an anti-tank ditch, prepared in a few days with no military manpower and integrated by a barrage of mines, while another minefield Eluet el-Asel it pushed up to Chaulan to obstruct the moment enemy from the east and south. Forward, isolated, there was Mechili, an intersection of trails on which stood an old low fort, around which were lying some minefields. Throughout the area Derna-Mechili were emplaced total 30,000 mines.

In order to garrison the area another possibility that did not exist that one to collect the units scattered in the region or en route from the Tripolitania. The command of such troops was entrusted to Gen. Cona, commander of the XX Army Corps, with the following directives: to organize to defense the ridge of Derna with emplacements of medium-caliber gun batteries; to constitute a point of support to Berta; to prepare or a mass of maneuver in order to carry out counterattacks prepare one or more masses of maneuver to carry out counter-attacks along the directions that the *gebel* down towards the south and Mechili push toward the north.

Gen. Tellera, that on 23 December resigned from post of the Chief of the G.S. of the Comando Superiore in order to assume command of the 10th Army, specified the next day that the complexity of the positions would have had static character but it would have been integrated from a dynamics reaction to work of the units situated at Mechili. To that Cona was adhered that, in particular, ordered to support the defense of Derna to the *Wadi* having the same name , assuring more lengthy possible use of the airfield el-Ftéiah and deployed in the fort of

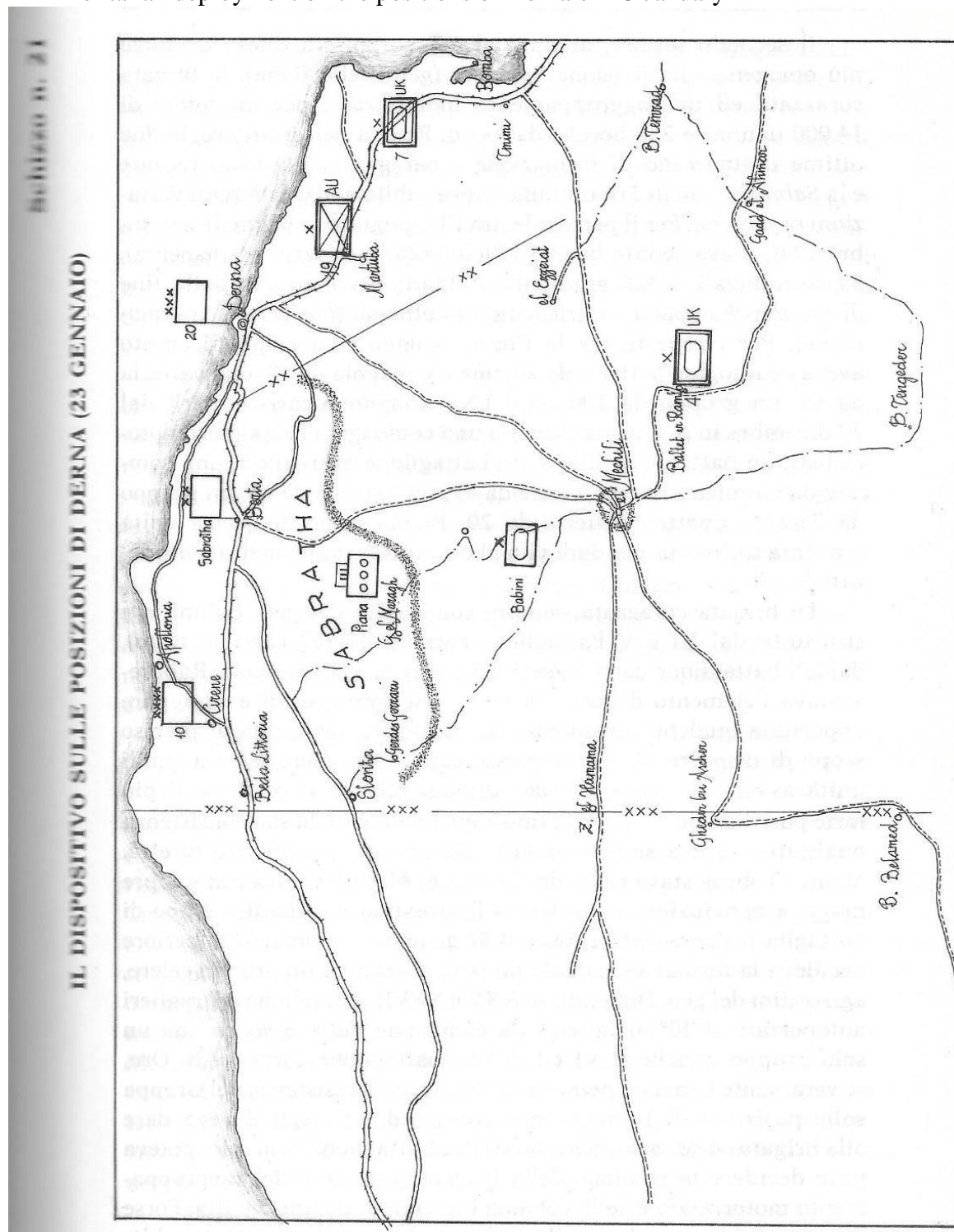
Berta and correspondence of the great handle of the *Wadi* the artilleries that could not be motorized. About the maneuver mass he arranged the formation of four units located at Berta, Chaulan, Derna, and Mechili.

After the fall of Bardia and to continuation of the directives for given the delaying battle, Graziani felt the need to return on the argument since it comprised the danger incumbent on all the alignment. It was probable - he wrote to the main subordinate commanders - that the enemy, once to contact with our organization in the western Cyrenaica, tried forcing the hinge of the right wing at Mechili, because that would have allowed the opening of the way to Benghazi is to penetrate from south in the *gebel*. Therefore he had to direct himself to face such eventuality and to avoid that in such a way going around all the position of the *gebel*. Discounted as given that if Mechili was attacked by armored forces, all the mobile units had to be located so as to be able to participate to the battle: a simple warning had to provoke their quick inflow to Mechili. Besides to all the predispositions that the engineers and the quartermaster would have assumed in order to facilitate such attempt, to the 5th Air Fleet the intensification of the reconnaissance for the timely discovery of the movements of the enemy was demanded. Naturally it was necessary to save to the maximum fighters and bombers so as to throw into the fight, at the opportune moment, the greatest number of aircraft.

Some of it derived a modification in the alignment of the forces. The defensive position, the primary entrusted to the entire Corp, was subdivided into two fields employed by the Command of the army: the "Derna" and "Berta-Mechili" (sketch n. 21).

The first one, by the orders of Gen. Bergonzoli, was held with heterogonous units: 5,000 men of varied origin, without an organic Command, operating appearance, harmony. The units of greater consistency were the II/86th Infantry of the *Sabratha*, the XVIII Libyan battalion, the Libyan parachutists battalion, a battalion formation from the depot of the *Marmarica*. Except the first one, the others were battalions in name only. The infantry-support weapons and the artilleries of varied bore were instead many. The only units endowed with intrinsic mobility were the 60th Bersaglieres motorcyclists company, one M tank platoon (last the four of the battalion) and two armored cars, for the greater part thrusts on the coast, towards Martuba, to protect the forward airfields.

The Italian deployment on the positions of Derna on 23 January



The second area, entrusted to XX Corps, was defended by a more homogenous forces: the *Sabratha* division (Gen. Della Bona), the Armored Brigade and a motorized grouping, for a total of 14,000 men and 254 guns. But, on closer look, the two last units were of rather recent formations and for its part the *Sabratha*, already in Tripolitania, had endured not indifferent organic variations. For the personnel, between 11 June and the first of September 1940 it had yielded 93 officers (26 in permanent service), 59 non-commissioned officers and 428 graduates and soldiers; for converse from the end of September then it had received 114 officials (6 in permanent service). For the units, between the end of June and first of August it had yielded two 20 mm. batteries, one 47 mm. company, one 65 mm. battery, a 100 mm. group the and LX light tank battalion; from 20 December then it had received one Bersaglieres motorcyclists company, a Libyan battalion, a machine-gun battalion, a chemical company, three 47 mm. companies, six 65 mm. batteries, a 75/27 group and four 20 mm. batteries. Good part of these units were used in order to give life to the cited motorized grouping ⁽¹⁾.

The Armored Brigade, always commanded by Gen. Babini, was constituted from the III and V M 13 tank battalion (57 tanks in all), from the LX light tank battalion (25 tanks) and minor units. It represented the element of force of all the field and on it appears opportune some consideration. It had been realized to the precise goal to decide of an able the whole to hold head to similar enemy units. Logic wants, therefore, that it became as strong as possible, much more than until that moment its qualitative consistency it had always induced to avoid the direct comparison. While Tobruk was falling, the area of Mechili came always with greater considered conviction the next inevitable battlefield between armor, nevertheless on 22 January the Comando Superiore decided the formation, which proper reserves, of a quick group, under the orders of Gen. Bignami, with the XXV and XXVII motorized machine-gun battalion, the 10th field artillery of *Bologna* with a single group and also the VI and XXI the medium tank battalions. Now, if truly Graziani thought to renew the resistance of the Grappa on the positions of Derna, as he had ordered, he had to give to the armored brigade these two battalions also. Not only: he could also decide the joining of the Armored Brigade, the motorized grouping and the Bignami column into a single unit. Perhaps the things would have gone in the same way, perhaps the defeat would be

only delayed in the time, would have been anticipated in the space (Mechili instead of Beda Fomm); however the dispositions would have been consequential to the understandings. It is rather true that VI Tank Battalion, also if arrived complete, still had need of acclimatization and of amalgam and the XXI Battalion - constituted from the personnel of a disbanded light tank battalion and from the equipment disembarked in bulk at Benghazi - was in quite organic crisis, so that the same Graziani did not think about employing them before a ten of days. In any case, and it will be looked at later on, the idea to concentrate all the armored forces, if it existed, was not pursued with conviction.

On the plan then of the articulation of the forces, holding present that the 10th Army was a single army corps, the XX, and this with a single division, probably it would have been preferable to entrust to Gen. Tellera the conduct of the battle in *all* of western Cyrenaica, instead of simply allow him a more advanced wing. Perhaps in such case the issue of the reserve would have been seen under another point of view, much more than the defense on the *gebel* it could be held from the entire XX Corp. As far as attributing to a lieutenant general to which Bergonzoli the Derna area, at level yes and not of a brigade, it is a very debatable provision, nor frankly recognized valid psychological reasons (since, at the bottom, it was) available.

The Italian design to take advantage of the *gebel* appeared obvious at once to O'Connor. According to the information available, Derna and Mechili, entrusted respective to the *Sabratha* division and the Babini Brigade reinforced by an infantry regiment, would have been held as a advance positions. The 10th Army Command resulting in Cirene, that of the XX Corps at Berta and seemed that between Cirene and Slonta there were unit of the *Brescia* and *Pavia* divisions. The composition of the Babini Brigade was not known but sure it had medium tanks, perhaps two battalions. On the 23rd the 7th Armored Brigade was to contact with the advanced elements of the Derna area while patrols of the 4th Armored Brigade moved themselves near to Mechili. On the 24th the 19th Australian Brigade replaced the 7th Armored Brigade and began its pressure towards Derna. In a pair of days it made to degrade the foretold elements advanced until to the airfield and managed to put in action a dangerous attempt of infiltration, than, arrived at Fort Rudero, finally it was rejected.

But the greatest concerns of Graziani concerned the area Mechili, not only for the strategic possibilities it offered,

but also because it was isolated by about fifty kilometers to south of Eluet el-Batna, the most southern position of the alignment on the *gebel*. The morning of the 23rd the reconnaissance and the radio interceptions had provoked the feeling of a by now the next attack; in the first hours of the afternoon, received from the small garrison of Mechili confirmation of the approach of elements of the 4th Armored Brigade, Gen. Cona signaled to the Commander of the Army the imminence of the action. Tellera then ordered the movement of the Piana Mot. Group (less than a nucleus, that had to remain at Eluet el-Batna) and of the armored car squadron (six prizes of war). The first one had to hold themselves in measure of employment the next day; the second one had the task, rather vague, of surveillance, information and competition to the attack from the area of Bir esc Sceteni, one score of kilometers to the west of Mechili. Graziani, approached at once to Berta, just found the opportunity that also the Armored Brigade oriented itself to move, therefore at 21:15 Gen. Cona received the order to together take part the next day with the brigade and the grouping. The 10th Bersaglieres, reserve of the army, were ready to come in its turn, if necessary. At dawn of the 24th the Babini column and the Piana column proceeded towards the south, in viewed connection through the *Wadi* er Ramla. Towards 08:00, at approximately six kilometers from Mechili, the head of the motorized signaled to be under fire from the units of the English 4th Armored Brigade, coming from the south. The reaction was immediate, then the V Tank Battalion counterattacked and the enemy broke off the contact, withdrawing towards the east, beyond the limits of throw of our artilleries. Little later, at Mechili, other British elements were sighted in withdraw: the participation of the III Tank Battalion accelerated the retrograde movement. The action evidently had been of limited proportions and it had been translate into a local success, but lost seven tanks against about ten of the enemy ⁽²⁾.

Note the episode, which is not the first nor will be the last of this part of the country, such as mobile forces do not seem to be used with a balance unitary concept. The Babini and Piana columns were initiated by the Army Command - while they depended on the XX Corps - at Mechili, but it is not the definition of the commander in charge of the action tactics. Also presuming that Gen. Babini, for reasons of rank, took on the place the reins of the situation, is obvious that organizational necessities and of conduct would have preferred a very different structure of the forces. The army was in no conditions to direct from far away an operation of this sort.

the loss of seven tanks and the news of remarkable British concentrations induced Tellera to decide the retreat of his columns towards Bir Semander, some thirty of kilometers more to the north, and the withdrawal of the garrison of Mechili. Bringing current of the events, Graziani wrote at once a very cross personal letter. The abandonment of Mechili - he found - would have given to the enemy free way and fact the fall of all the defensive alignment, that is just what he was disparately trying to avoid. Of the other part to retire to Bir Semander - that it would immediately have devaluated the capacity, which that was, of the action of the morning - with the purpose of casting themselves to the rear of the adversary, once they started along the Mechili - Benghazi direction, was a devout illusion. Therefore it was necessary to hold firm to the decision to fight at Mechili, much more than on one side the enemy he would also have had need of a little of time for the refueling of ammunition and fuel and for the other two tank battalions in preparation at Benghazi would have been started, as soon as possible, where their presence was most useful, that is to Mechili ⁽³⁾. But a little later (21:00 hours approximately) the head of the information office of the Comando Superiore, in delineating the probable situation of the day after, showed the probability that in front of Mechili concentrated the 4th Armored Brigade with 150 tanks and the 11th Hussars with its armored cars. Graziani then, in the fear of accepting a battle in much too unfavorable a force ratio, had a afterthought and made to cancel by telephone (21:30 hours) the letter just forwarded, specifying the Commander of the army *"to order the regression of the Armored Brigade until to point X, where that is it can be at dawn, awaiting therefore so as to be able to take part offensively and while to disengaging itself from the grip of superior enemy forces"*, in other words agreeing with Tellera. These, however, the next morning he returned to the position, probably worried about the right flank of the Army. There is no trace of the communication, but there is an answer to Graziani:

"I take note of your opinion about withdrawal behind the Armored Brigade. In my 01/1100 Op. Last night I have clearly set out what are the functions that the Armored Brigade must exercise with regard to enemy penetration on the Mechili-Benghazi road. Given that this task & to consider paramount for the Brigade same time that I will answer you personally, you have it as you see fit without consulting me beforehand & within the limits of your competence (...) " ⁽⁴⁾

Tellera left in place the garrison of Mechili and defined in following final guidelines of employment for the Brigade: *"for it part the pre-eminent task is that to hinder enemy penetration on Mechili-Bengasi director, must avoid, absolutely, to allow themselves to be involved in only direct enemy action against the Mechili garrison & to conserve instead freedom maneuver & maximum efficiency for its essential task "*. At Graziani's request he moved the Bignami column from Ghemines to Soluch (a score of kilometers to the east), thinking the locality more adapted to foil enemy headway.

The 25th was a calm day. Although they were spotted from aerial reconnaissance, since the 08:00, four mechanized units on the several convergent tracks on Mechili in a radius from 15 and 45 kilometers, the activity of the enemy was limited to actions of patrols and artillery. Graziani wrote to the Supreme Command who by now appeared sure the advance of the English 4th and 7th Armored Brigades towards the escapement of Derna-Berta. Also around Mechili armored units of a sure entity were noticed, so that *"in order to avoid our armored forces, constituent only availability of the sort, were overwhelmed, have ordered during the night they withdrew towards the north (...) & wait in power in order to resume offensive action on Mechili (...)"*. He added of being *"from 50 days with folded arms without to have been able to carry out some counter-offensive action"* and that, feeling in the conditions of a captain on a ship in the process of sinking, had ordered the evacuation of the civilians from Derna and Benghazi ⁽⁵⁾. That evening, signaling profusely to the 5th Air Fleet, requesting a pair of fighter groups. He answered Mussolini assuring ready to leave, weather conditions allowing, more than one hundred aircraft, between G.50, CR.42 and Macchi 200, and concluding *"I want to say, dear Marshal, than we all eat the liver literally from morning to night send what you need in arduous battle"* ⁽⁶⁾. There was a brief exchange of telegram between Graziani and Mussolini completely rhetorical, whose practical result was that Mussolini probably fed some hope of a card left to be played. Sorry, knowing the facts, read that *"we seek with all the forces of 'spirit and the will to continue this resistance to permanently stop the enemy advance"* ⁽⁷⁾.

From British part the ideas were made more and more clear. First of all the *Royal Air Force*, also feeling the effects of two months of hard combats, had by now a position of clear advantage. After the fall of Tobruk the 73rd and the 271st fighter groups were moved to Ain el-Gazala, while the cooperation groups of the army took Tmimi base. It was fortune, for Collishaw, to have been able to capture many aerial bombs and benzene and this, of course,

greatly facilitated events. From 25 January the airports of Apollonia, Barce, Maraua and Soluch were attacked with always greater intensity in parallel with the effort that was wanted to be exercised on land. Seen the presence at Mechili of a strong company of tanks and artillery, the important distance between Mechili and Derna (more than eighty kilometers by air) induced one to think - O'Connor thought - that more to the north there were traits of a very weakly defense. In other words, assuming the two Italian towns of paramount interest, it appeared the opportunity to deal separately with two parts of the 10th Army. First, he decided to destroy or capture the Babini Brigade. He ordered therefore to Gen. Mackay to exert a strong pressure on the Derna front and sending a brigade in to reinforce the 7th Armored Division and entrusted Gen. Creagh to lead an pincer action towards Mechili so that in no case the Italian tanks to be able to escape. The 7th Armored Brigade, coming down from north, had to attack from east, the 4th Armored, already moving itself to the north-west of the town, had the task to complete the encirclement. We already know that just the fighting of the 24th had pushed Tellera to withdraw towards Bir Semander the Babini and Piana columns, so that O'Connor remarkably remained bewildered when, on the night of the 26th a report of a squadron of the 11th Hussars in motion signaled a large Italian mechanized column towards the north and, subsequently, patrols of the 7th Armored Brigade found Mechili abandoned by its garrison. The pursuit of the 4th Armored Brigade and the participation of fighter squadrons proved insufficient; between the rolling land, the rains, the deficiency of fuel and mechanical breakdowns led early (29 January) to abandon the hope of hooking the Italians.

For four days the 19th Australian Brigade of Robertson attacked to the south of Derna, in order to avoid - as understood by of O' Connor - that a part of the *Sabratha* could come in aid of Babini, and must admit that it achieved good results. The morning of the 26th the action in the plain of el-Ftejah was contained, but, holding present the difficulties that were outlining in correspondence of the Derna *Wadi*, the 10th Army Command arranged the evacuation of the positions that controlled the airfield, Siret Ben Ameir and Le Grotte farm. Remained behind the small garrisons of Forts Rudero and Piemonte ⁽⁸⁾, being range of massed artilleries of Derna, appeared in a position to still supporting a delaying function. To the south, on the section of front of the Enver Bey house, the II/86th Infantry had not been able

to prevent to infiltrations in the wooded area and the intervention of a small unit of support had not been able weld the interruption that now appeared in the disposition of the battalion. Evidently the feeling of inferiority caused from a static alignment of the unit too much space, against a adversary who had wide spaces to disposition for sufficient infiltrations to invalidate the firmness of the defense, weighed on the decisions of the heads or perhaps they became account as that the defensive system, as had been implanted, could not stand. Fact is that Graziani called the attention of Tellera on the threat of encircling to short radius of Derna and separation of Derna from Berta and advised him to preview the participation of the army reserve. Questionable this the interference in the strait within of the inferior rank, but perhaps still more disputable the decision to reinforce the said reserve of the army with the VI Tank Battalion. At 15:00 of that same 26 January Tellera approached the Command of XX Corp and entrusted Cona to reestablish the situation along the Derna *Wadi* somewhat putting at his disposition the 10th Bersaglieres (less a battalion) and narrowing somewhat the field of Derna. Cona organized the counterattack for the next day but the same evening, in forecast of circumstances that could have compromised the freedom of maneuver of the armored brigade, communicated to the Commander of the Army the intention to clear Mechili and to carry the Babini and Piana columns to the north of Bir Semander. Tellera he approved and went further, deciding the retreat "*in the direction bringing himself at first to Gasr Maragh in the Bir Semander area*". In short, he wanted to decidedly carry the forces in his care to support of the defensive system. There was a precise reason. In the evening Graziani had reconsidered the possible development of the enemy attack and made new decisions. If it does, how it all at the time made him feel, had mainly oriented against the Derna-Berta-Chaulan front the army had to give battle to the bitter end on those positions, engaging with all that he had.

"Only in the case - he specified to Tellera - that the enemy forces in the movement from Mechili on Benghazi - that would circumvent all the forces of the *Gebel*- meanwhile the Armored Brigade will try with delaying actions on the enemy flank of the march, as a result of my signal, you will have unhooked timely the current positions and to maneuver in order to contrast the enemy penetration, supporting there to the next *gebel* positions you already studied and recognize.

You take therefore the necessary predispositions also for such eventuality (...)”⁽⁹⁾.

The 27th saw swept up the two blockhouses Rudero and Piemonte, after a violent cannonade. Instead on the Derna *Wadi* the situation was reestablished with local actions. Still more to the south, the Babini column was stopped undisturbed at Ras Tcherin, about fifty kilometers to the north-west of Mechili, and the motorized grouping was moved near Beda Littoria, passing to the command of the Commander of the Army. In such a way the morning of the 27th the Italian mobile forces had the following dependencies: the Babini brigade from the XX Corps, the 10th Bersaglieres and the motorized grouping from the Army, the VI and XXI Tank Battalions from the Comando Superiore. To notice that where the battle had been ignited on the *gebel*, also these last ones would have been placed “*timely*” at the disposition of Tellera. Timeliness on which it is legitimate to nourish many doubts: by now it had been looked at with which speed they could change the events and the transfer of the two tank battalions from Soluch to Beda Littoria (approximately 190 kilometers by air) did not involve less than several hours, the *Royal Air Force* allowing for arrival. In compensation a share of the reserve of the Comando Superiore (a machine-gun battalion, a 75/27 battery and five armored cars) had been started at once on Berta under the command of XX Corps.

The day after Graziani was informed by the S.I.M. of some rumors emerged in military atmospheres of Cairo, according to which the Commander of XIII Corp meant to limit himself to face the field of Derna and to act with the 7th Armored Division on the pre-desert direction for Benghazi. The information supplied from the aerial reconnaissance put in prominence the presence of mechanized units in several localities of the boarder of contact, but, for in truth, none of it appeared indicative, therefore they could have credited or not any hypothesis. Until towards 13:30 arrived the communication that the support group of the 7th Armored Division was moving towards Chaulan. This meant the intention of eradicate the southern strong point of the position, with the consequences that it would ensue. The Babini brigade received order then to retreat further, bringing themselves to Gasr el-Maragh (ten of kilometers to the south-west of Chaulan) so as to be in conditions for counterattacking on the left flank the eventual movement of the support group. The situation appeared very fluid and it was reflected on

uncertainties of the Commanders. The morning of the 29th, at 05:30, Graziani inserted still in the problems of the army, himself arranging that the Babini brigade from its new location of Gasr el-Maragh prevented every infiltration or, worse still, enemy penetration towards De Martino (el Faidia) - Cirene.

According to radio interceptions, the English 6th *Royal Tanks* at 07:00 had to move towards the north-west, that convinced Graziani that O'Connor, having met on *gebel* a more tenacious resistance than previewed, it was resolved to turn from south all the group of forces that was before him - that is as much as remained of the 10th Army - cutting the two *gebel* roads just in direction of Cirene. The abandonment of Derna became unavoidable, issue but much delicate one that Graziani did not want to resolve without to feel out the main subordinate commanders. The meeting took place at 10:30 near the headquarters of the XX Corp. The marshal begin synthesizing the news on the enemy, then exposed the preliminary question: could the Babini brigade resist at Gasr el-Maragh against the British 7th Armored Brigade, reinforced from a part of the 4th and all of the 11th Hussars, perhaps that it was already projecting its patrols towards Slonta, that is well to the west of Gasr el-Maragh? and if the 4th Armored Brigade, at the moment to the south-west of Martuba ⁽¹⁰⁾, given the difficulties of the land in the area of Derna, had flowed even on the direction Bir Semander-Gasr el Maragh-De Martino? *"Of all the company - Graziani ended - I judge difficult that only the Armored Brigade can, beyond a sure limit, to resist to this pressure"*. As the speed of events, the question became rhetorical and naturally all those present agreed. From this judgment they derived some considerations.

The first point: no doubt that if the enemy had bypassed is the resistance of Babini at Gasr el-Maragh is that one of the motorized grouping to the village De Martino all the alignment on the *gebel* would be remained bottled. It was obvious.

The seconds point: in such eventuality it became opportune to continue the defense to the bitter end of the positions of Derna or it did not allow, instead, to recover the four battalions and eight batteries there in engaged and move them double time to De Martino in order to prevent the enemy attempt? All agreed. And then: since the evacuation of the area of Derna would have left the left flank of the defense of Berta uncovered, by now reduced to a stump, was preferable to keep

maintain equally the this stump or to withdraw also these troops (eight battalions and seven batteries)? All were favorable "*on the whole*" to the alternative.

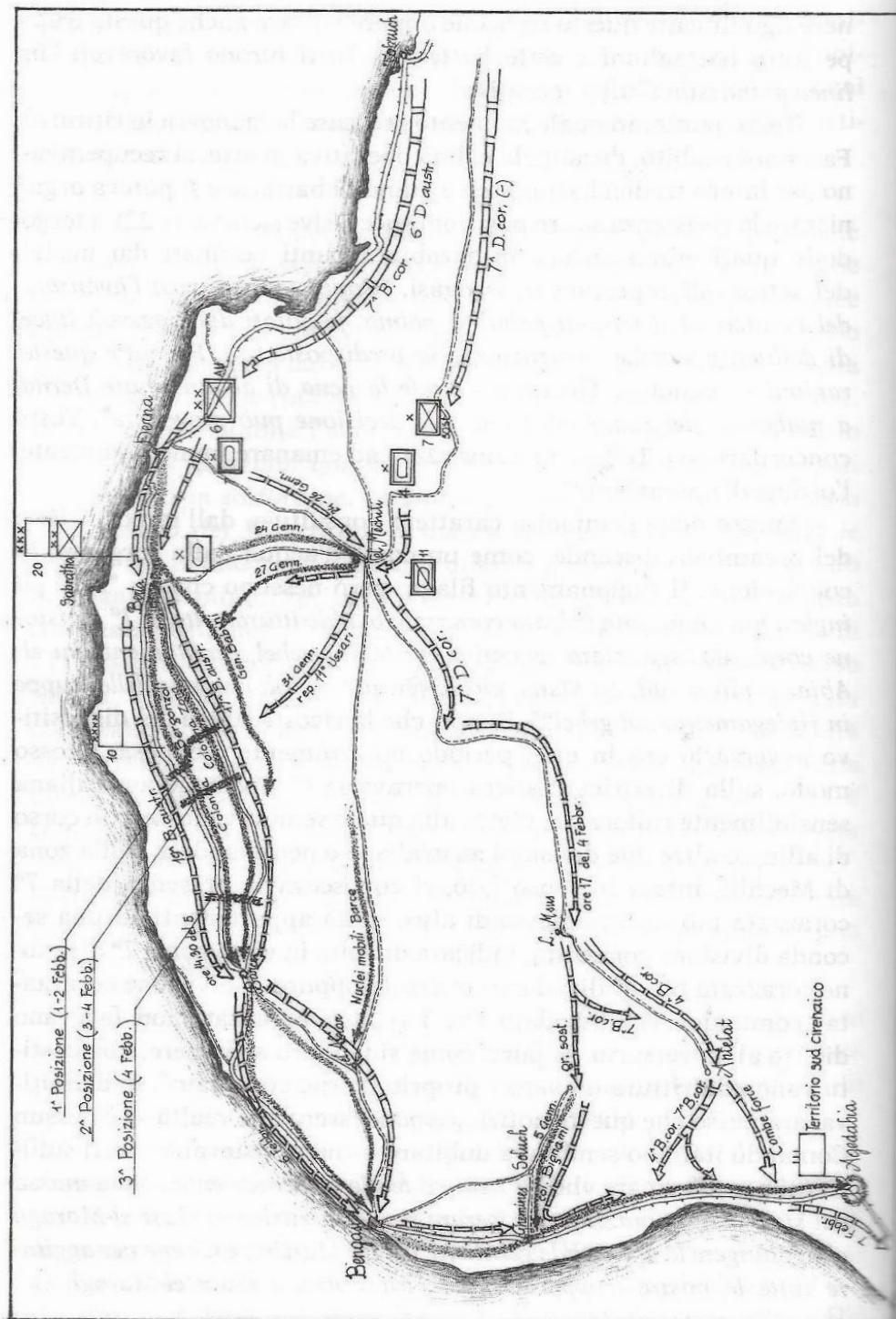
Third point: at what time to order the maneuver of retreat? Doing so immediately, during the operating calm in the action, for the recovery the entirety of thirteen battalions and fifteen batteries and the resistance could be organized on three successive positions (sketch n. 22), behind which were still usable the points were occupied by the units covering the sector of Benghazi, "*Will contrast as the advance of the enemy and on the ground palm tree to palm tree, facilitated by the easy lines of defense and the interruptions already prepared (...), For all these reasons - concluded Graziani - it is worth the pain to abandon Derna in spite of the sorrow that such decision can provoke*", All agreed and Tellera was authorized to emanate immediately the operational orders. ⁽¹¹⁾

Often in these meetings of advisory character, from the formulation of the preamble it flows down, like a water course from the source, the conclusion. The reasoning was circular, but no one asked: "*And if English send one armored brigade or even all the 7th Armored Division, dropped suddenly from the gebel, directly on el-Abiar or more to the south, on Msus, who will stop them? and what happens to the troops in retreat on the gebel*", You notice that the reconstruction of the enemy dispositions was in that time has several shortcomings. Largely, on the coastal direction operated the 6th Australian Division considerably reinforced, behind which it seemed they were in course of inflow another two Australian or New Zealand divisions. In the area of Mechili, understanding in sense flanking, knew the presence of the 7th Armored more a band than other units belonging to a second armored division, indicated of now and then as the 7th Armored Division plus, 4th Armored Division or 2nd Armored Division; however it was established that the armored units did not make defect the enemy, if also, as he was stretched to think, they did not quite constitute a true and just "an armored corp.". After all, he admitted that this news would respond to the reality - and no Italian Commander seemed to doubt it - sufficient indications did not exist in order to assert that "*the enemy evidently stretches with the mass of its medium armor to operate for the direction of Gasr el-Maragh and to reach the two gebeliche roads between De Martino and Cirene in order to go around all our troops lined up between Derna and Gasr el-Maragh (...)*" ⁽¹²⁾

In any case the dice was rolled. At 12:30 Tellera arranged verbally for them to withdraw from the defensive arrangements: in the Derna area where was

Schizzo n. 22

**LA RITRATA DELLA 10^a ARMATA DAL GEBEL
29 GENNAIO - 7 FEBBRAIO 1941**



to start the retrograde movement in the evening and take in the day the next intermediate position already recognized; the Berta area, instead, could begin at once. The enemy let them do so. Contrarily to the forecasts, for all of the 29th he limited himself to actions of patrol and to artillery fire, then on 30 January the 19th Australian Brigade movements, repaired a great street interruptions and in the late afternoon he entered Derna, by now empty, pushing at once recon elements ahead, while patrols of the 11th Hussars held contact in front of Chaulan. The order of O'Connor was that to avoid the attention of the Italians on the events at Mechili.

Actually O'Connor was still quite uncertain on the way forward. Once known the abandonment of Derna, he realized that all the troops of the 10th Army, including Babini, were concentrated on the *gebel* and therefore probably would not have left their positions without a fight by clinging to the ground. To tell more, it was to be expected resistance to the east of Benghazi, where it seemed they were landed German units. Essentially, advanced along the Mechili-el-Abiar Benghazi he would not only have encountered some difficulties in land considered not very suitable for tanks, but would have risked not being able to turn the right flank of the Italian Army. So it was preferable to the Msus direction, to the southwest. On this belief O'Connor sketched a plan according to which the bulk of the 6th Australian had to continue to exert strong pressure on *gebel* while the 7th Armored, reinforced by a Australian Brigade, would direct to Msus. At this point it appeared an alternative: if Graziani had decided to close in Benghazi, the 7th Armored would continue until Soluch, then cut the coastal road south from Benghazi and invested; if instead Graziani had continued their retreat, the division would have obliquity to move more to the south and cut the coastal road going from Antelat. The timing of the operation depended on the ability to power the effort through the desert. Now, since January 27 had been established new depots n. 12 and n. 13 pitched to the height of Tmimi and the port of Tobruk was rapidly put back into operation by the *Royal Navy*, so that the first ship was discharged on January 28 and 1 February port facilities allowed to download 900 tones per day. All this was of immense help, but not enough; it was necessary to set up another depot (n. 14) fifty kilometers south-west of Mechili, with ten days of food and fuel and two days of fire, for a total of 3,000 tons.

In order to realize the accumulation of this material at least twelve days were necessary. Perhaps the use of the port of Derna could save time, but the hope fell at once as soon as the insufficient potentiality of the local equipments was found. Beyond to the issue of supplies, there was the problem of the repairs. The 7th Armored Division was left 50 medium tanks and 95 light in not good conditions. The 7th *Royal Tanks* had been sent to Egypt via sea for a general review of all the *Matilda*, but it awaited arrival in the area, between the 7 and 9 February, of two medium tank regiments of the 2nd Armored Division. Therefore for the moment the best *cruisers* could be passed from the 4th to the 7th Brigade in good conditions of efficiency. O'Connor hoped to resume the race towards the West 10-12 February. Arriving at these conclusions after many general discussions in his headquarters at Bomba, he entrusted Gen. Dorman-Smith, dispatched by Wavell on 29 January in order to study the situation, of sent by aircraft to Cairo with the plan in order to obtain the consent of the Commander in Chief. On 2 February Dorman-Smith was to return with the approval of Wavell.

The evening of 30 January to the eyes of Graziani the events seemed to turn to the worse:

"From the interceptions and the aerial reconnaissance today - he communicated to the Comando Supremo - his deduction that the enemy 7th Armored Division has been moved to the Abiar Bu Sfeia-Bir esc Sceteui-el Mechili area, is oriented towards the track for Gerdes Gerrari, as on that pre-desert track for el Abiar. This shows more and more as the enemy avoids to attack our positions from Berta to Gasr el-Maragh for the forces that they fortify to them and the reinforcements that are practiced by you and tries, instead, to make to fall on all our deployment by effect of maneuver with encircling at a narrow radius, trying to earn a result on the southern *gebel* & is at wide scope heading at Benghazi. This concept is clearly expressed in the wireless bulletin of London of 18:00 hours of this evening in paragraph sixth. The day tomorrow will clear situation" ⁽¹³⁾.

Then on the 31st reached other alarming news: a strong Free French unit along the southern borders of Libya aiming to the occupation of Fezzan; the presence at Murzuk of the old *Senussi* Chief Abd el Gebil Sif en Nasr in contact with dissident French elements; Australian units affirmed themselves on the escarpment to the west of Derna, before the elimination of the small garrison of Bir es Sebil; a void before

Gasr el-Maragh and instead enemy presence in the direction of Chaulan (1st middle position), of Zauiet el Hammana-el Abiar and Msus. At this point, 12:45 hours," *by this time he was sure that enemy tries total bypass for the Mechili - Benghazi* ", Graziani emanated the general withdraw order on Barce. At the same time he arranged the concentration of the mobile units for covering the sector of Benghazi to Regima and the insertion of the XXI Battalion of medium tanks in the reserve of the Comando Superiore, that was about to enter the scene:

"(...) with my lack of reserve I will try to withhold the enemy outlet in the plain of Soluch. This decision is unavoidability dictated from the configuration of the theater of operations and from the criterion before having to lose either territory or troops, I prefer to save these last ones for employment at obstruction of the road for the Tripolitania deploying in Sirtica" ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Among the elements of concern there were only the hypotheses on what would make the enemy do, but also something much more concrete. Tellera had in all 850 trucks. Deduct the 300 of the Babini brigade and a hundred for the indispensable services, the remaining 450 motor vehicles. Now, for the general withdrawn about one thousand of motor vehicles were necessary; consequently the army had need of another 400 trucks at least. With such reinforcements the retrograde movement would have been completed in two nights, it is worth to say in four days. Only disadvantage: the 450 trucks already available belonged nearly entirely to the reserve of the army that, in such a way, it would remain on the ground...

While Tellera tried to resolve in some way the difficult problem, the Supreme Commander received a telegram from Mussolini:

"Communicate to me the approximate positions that you mean to give future employment of the forces in Tripolitania including the German Light Division that will begin to flow on the first of February. You hold account necessity to tap the caravan route from Sirtica they can directly adduce to Tunisia & to allow eventual union with dissident French *forces*" ⁽¹⁵⁾.

If Graziani still had some hesitancy, the dispatch would have made to pass since it appeared as an open invitation to concentrate every thought on the Tripolitania. He exposed therefore just the program. At Sirte, at the moment entrusted to a modest unit of the 5th Army, intended to bring together the troops of the 10th Army

withdrawing from Cyrenaica. Next to Tripoli he thought to reconstitute the 5th Army with the task to defend the entrenched field and to supply cover to the Tunisian frontier. As far as the new divisions - *Ariete*, *Trento*, and the German 15th Light - it would have withheld in Tripolitania until they were complete and then he would employ to them "*according to necessity that only future events will be able to determine*". In consequence, as soon as the withdraw had reached an adapted development, would have left the direction of the operations in Cyrenaica to Tellera and he would have been settled down at Sirte with the Comando Superiore⁽¹⁶⁾.

Even in Rome he was weighing the situation, in part for the obvious gravity of the events, in part for the issue of German aid by now established. A study of the operations office expressed for the Supreme Command: dated 1 February many doubts on the possibility of resolution of the withdraw on Sirte because the English armored units heading directly at Agedabia would unavoidably have preceded the 10th Army, burdened with of a greater distance, of smaller speed of movement and a minimum of the *gebel* fight. Given to the rhythm assumed from the operations and the absence of whichever opposition along the Mechili-Agedabia, there was from thinking that perhaps also before 8 February the enemy would have reached the objective. Occupied Agedabia - whose small garrison could not have given serious resistance, not unless Graziani had preceded English - the enemy would have been forced to constitute a large logistics base. Thanks to the port of Benghazi could have contained the period of own rearrangement of logistic depots in some thirty of days. However, before 1 March he would not have been in conditions for resuming the advance towards the Tripolitania. Held account of the reports of distance (900 kilometers from Agedabia to Tripoli) and of the poverty of resources and above all of water in the area, and following from lessening of action carried out from R. Aeronautics and the *X Fliegerkorps*, could not be thought that Tripoli came invested before three months, that is before the end of May. In this context and in view of the trails adducing to the West, is worth to say the via Balbia and the inner track-Marada-Zella-Socna-Misurata/Tripoli roadway, became opportune to garrison Sirte conveniently and the oases of Zella and Socna and to reinforce at once such garrisons with unit of the *Ariete* Armored Division and, when possible, by the German 15th Light.

2. THE BATTLE OF BEDA FOMM (5-7 FEBRUARY 1941)

The order of operations N. 1 for the 10th Army, circulated 31 January, fixed the dispositions for the withdraw from the *gebel*. In the night on 1 February the Derna and Berta areas had to supply to the folding back to the 1st *gebel* position of all the motorized units and of that it was possible to temporary truck-transport with the vehicles placed at their disposition. The Armored Brigade passed to the command of the Commander of the Army, gathering for the moment in the area of Ras Fcherin for protection of the right flank of the position, and the mobile unit of the military area of Barce (was supplied essentially from the XXXIV Libyan battalion) had to concentrate at Zauiet en Neian in order to delay the eventual enemy advance on the Mechili-el Abiar-Bengasi trail. The movement was carried out undisturbed in the dusk, but the following morning the rearguard of the 60th *Sabratha*, was attacked suddenly by the 19th Australian Brigade, was overwhelmed. The losses were calculated at 20 officers and 600 non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Not there is much to be amazed at. For several days the moral of the troops already was in decline from fatigue, the defective operation of the services and the intermingling of the units. On 31 January the commander of the division wrote in his diary:

"The frequent and long marches on foot carrying on their backs arms and materials, without adequate restorative rest and often only eating reserve provisions, have somewhat disabled the physical conditions of some units very tried.

The soldier has by now understood that the movements are a withdrawing maneuver: the order of lighting of the individual equipment has made it to mean that our situation is not good; many are still the willing and the resistant ones that carry on their backs all the one which they can, arms and encompassed ammunition, and often the officers are forced to take part to make the lightening of weight. On the face of the mass is obvious discouragement and moral depression".

The directives for the night on the 2nd previewed the motor transport of all the units remaining in the line: those of the Berta area on and the 2nd position. The Armored Brigade had to retreat to the area of Gerrari and the Crucillà group (formed with the mobile nuclei of Barce) to the crossing of Charruba. Still the movements were developed with sufficient regularity, only disturbed by some aerial attacks against the columns in march on the roadway.

In these circumstances Graziani thought the withdraw by now

well started and considered joining the moment of transfer in Tripolitania, in sight of the new operating phase. He gave therefore the last directive, verbally, to Gen. Tellera for the further prosecution of the withdraw and decided that these, to begin from the 00:00 hours of 3 February, the forces located in Cyrenaica, including those of the territory assuming command of all south-Cyrenaica, with the task to collect in Sirtica the troops that were flowing out from the *gebel*. The direction of the outflow was entrusted to Gen. Cona.

Tellera, than had been moved to Benghazi with the Command of the Army, then put all the units (or nearly) under the directed command of the commander of the XX Corps: the 60th *Sabratha* Division, the Bergonzoli column, the Armored Brigade and the army reserve. Then he exposed to the main subordinate commanders to the program of wide principle for the further withdraw from the *gebel* (sketch n. 22) and that is:

- on the night of 3 February: evacuation of the troops from the 1st position to the 3rd position and to Barce;
- on the night of 4 February: evacuation from the 2nd position on Barce and constitution of a curtain of protection on the line of Regima-el Abiar with the Armored Brigade and the motorized group (of the army reserve);
- on the night of 5 February: the evacuation from the 3rd position and Barce on Toca and possibly on Benghazi;
- on the night of 6 February: prosecution of the movement on Agedabia and possibly evacuation of the troops of the protection curtain, that would have constituted the rearguard;
- in the following days 3rd, 4th and: smaller evacuation by the railroad on Benghazi of the infantry battalions and units that would not have been possible to motor-transport.

Finally he circulated dispositions for the transfers to carry out during the day of the 2nd and in the night of the 3rd, specifying that the 2nd and 3rd *gebel* position had to be strongly held, the retrograde movement of the non motorized units on Barce would be carried out for as much as possible by motor vehicles and the reserve, collected at Maraua, would have supplied the safety of the right flank of the position. Unfortunately he reply at once the impossibility to follow the planning because, in spite of the reduction brought in the services and the equipments, only 190 motor vehicles were placed at the disposition of the XX Corps. Consequently, it was necessary to modify the orders already given - with the repercussion, very serious in those circumstances, of a deep a disillusion in the men of the 60th *Sabratha* - and make to carry out on foot, in two nocturnal stages,

the movement until to Barce: The first on 3 February, the second on the 4th. The only heavy materials would have been loaded on the trucks. The deficiencies of the motor service were very strong. In part the deficiency of means, the unsatisfactory organization and the insufficient technical-moral training were shown with opened evidence. To add that the conductors were very tired and very shaken from the continuous aerial bombing which they were subject. Many trucks lay abandoned on the sides of the roads, some for breakdowns, others for damage caused by enemy attacks. The crash crews worked badly and the units took to towing when was possible. In such fragmented system of the centralization of means to the Commander of the Army was revealing himself inadequate and provoked losses for the demands of time, long distances empty of the vehicles, overload of work for the conductors, deficient surveillance of which was taken advantage of by more weary and less willingness to escape for the service. The ulterior situation got worse in the night because the number of serviceable motor vehicles used was revealed still smaller than foreseen. Fortunately the Australians, slowed down by the many street interruptions put in work by the engineers of the army, found it hard to resume contact with the rearguard of XX Corps. In compensation the *Royal Air Force* followed the movements, strafing and bombing the columns and inflicting painful losses.

On the *gebel* at 16:00 hours of the 3rd the 19th Australian brigade reached Berta, going around the interruption of the Derna-Berta road in correspondence of the hairpin curves to the west of the city. More to south they were spotted approximately 150 vehicles on the track towards Gerrari and an undetermined number of armored cars in a group forty of kilometers to the West of Mechili. Tellera, that morning had been pushed towards the defensive positions in order to visit the units of the Armored Brigade, particularly hit from the aerial attacks, thereafter gave to the Comando Superiore his impressions:

"Visited today Maraua troops. Good moral. Presume that according to passage for the third line this night will happen without disadvantages. As always lament the absence of our air force while the enemy, is active, producing losses on the road".

Unfortunately, if in some units the moral were still satisfactory in others appeared to have gotten very depressed. The troops on foot were remarkably tired and completely intermingled, and not

a little, the control and employment. "*Their war efficiency is by now problematical*" is the bitter annotation that the commander of the 60th *Sabratha* wrote in divisional diary the evening of the 3rd. Moreover that day the Intendenza had yielded the depots to the civil authorities, so that there did not exist any more someone to regulate operation of the services. In the afternoon the Crucillà group, that from Charruba just had been carried to the east of el-Abiar, received order to reach Regima, placed under the command of Gen. Bergonzoli. In night the previewed movements did not find an obstacle from the British side. All told, the hopes to succeed to clear the army without excessive damages were blooming, even if an official Reuter broadcast from Cairo radio had announced: "*Soon the British troops will give some surprises to the Italians*". In fact it was a matter of hours.

4 February.

At 08:00 of 4 February the head of the column on foot reached Barce. The lengthening endured during the march was strongest. Not only became uncertain the calculation of the losses but the arrival of the units, the squads, the small group, the isolated men continued all the day in one painful steady stream. At 10:00 Gen. Della Bona convened a meeting the regiment commanders and he informed them of the advanced dispositions circa the evacuation of the infantry. He was practical dismayed by their knowledge that on the division, as such, could no more be counted on:

"The physical fatigue, the insufficient rest, nutriment adapted to the circumstances and the incessant enemy aerial attacks have not rendered the mass very excitable, such that the order and the action of command succeed with difficulty" ⁽¹⁷⁾.

There were planed two trains: one with a 18:00 departure and other at 05:00 of the next day. With the first one the 86th Infantry had to depart, the LX machine-gun battalion and the LX complements battalion; with the second the 85th Infantry and the other units. Then, given the circumstances, the loading was mixed. At Benghazi the Army Commander of the reserve himself give other orders and the groups would have been started towards south by the Intendenza.

In the course of that morning some symptoms - aerial reconnaissance pushed towards el-Agheila and bombing of en-Nofilia - seemed to indicate that O'Connor aimed to extend the operations to Sirtica, therefore Graziani ordered Gen. Gariboldi, vice supreme commander, to go to Sirte with full military and civil powers

"for regulating the outflow from el Agheila and to prepare the forward defensive system". Moreover entrusted to Gen. Mario Aimone-Cat, successor to Gen. Porro in the command of the 5th Air Fleet, to protect with fighters the withdraw of the army. Tellera was not in possession of specifically indicative information on the intentions of the enemy and above all on the location of his armored brigades, however the general concept that presided to the distribution of the orders was to make soon, very soon, in order to avoid encirclement to south of Benghazi.

A series of provisions had lead to a particular articulation of the forces. For Gen. Cona now commanded three groups of motorized forces commanded by Generals Bergonzoli, Della Bona and Villanis. The Bergonzoli column was formed from the Armored Brigade ⁽¹⁸⁾, Piana motorized grouping ⁽¹⁹⁾ and the Crucillà unit ⁽²⁰⁾ and had the task to assure the withdrawal of the XX Corps from Barce for Benghazi-Agedabia *"with the firm occupation [of suitable positions] and eventual energetic reaction against every attempt of coming from enemy forces from the east towards the west"*. The Della Bona column was based on three formations constituted on 2 February in the scope of the 60th *Sabratha* Division: the Moech grouping ⁽²¹⁾, the Colpani grouping ⁽²²⁾ and the Allegros motorized unit ⁽²³⁾ and had the task "to carry out the movement astride of the coast, guaranteeing from every enemy attempt that wanted to hamper him". The Villanis column was created from the reserve of the Army Corps: Paschal grouping ⁽²⁴⁾, VI medium Tank Battalion, 10th Bersaglieres and VII 75/46 antiaircraft group. The foretold tasks had been delineated on the whole, but from time to time they would be adapted to the circumstances. It is of fact that responsibility of the lateral safety was entrusted to Bergonzoli against threats from the east, that is from Zauiet el-Hammana with el-Abiar, from Zauiet Msus with Soluch and Antelat. The safety against frontal resistance seemed entrusted to Della Bona, that in practice he would have guided the vanguard. Generically the intentions on the employment of the Villanis column, whose units had to remain part for the moment on the 3rd position (VI tank battalion and VII antiaircraft group) and he left at Benghazi (10th Bersaglieres).

In the late morning gen. Tellera decided on the immediate evacuation from the *gebel*: radio interceptions caused to think that the 11th Hussars had Soluch for an objective and that, recognized the Italian obstruction of Sceleidima, searched to north of such locality, in the Sidi Brahim area, a easier passage in order to come down from the *gebel* into the

Benghaziain plain. For his part Graziani had marked the probable advance of English mechanized from Msus towards Sceleidima. The order sent to Gen. Cona read:

"Night 4th to 5th current outflow all *gebel* troops for Tocr-Benghazi & el Abiar-Benghazi on Agedabia. Movement will be protect at el Abiar from the Armored Brigade & other annexed troops that subsequently will constitute the rearguard at a distance of approximately an hour of march from tail of the mass. Movement will have to be executed with iron discipline. Those people that try to depart from the units will be lost for the Army. For normal troops Gen. Bignami not to say will attend to your rearguard having that particular tasks. You arrange brilliantly all interruptions in your competence (...)" ⁽²⁵⁾.

First of all it does not comprehend as a nocturnal arc could be thought sufficient to cover nearly the 200 kilometers between the 3rd position and Agedabia, knowing perfectly the difficulties of transport ⁽²⁶⁾. Second the task assigned to the "*Armored Brigade & other annexed troops*", expression with which evidently the Bergonzoli column was wanted to be indicated, modified substantially from that deciding by Gen. Cona, on which said unit they depended: not more safety from the east as opposed to from the north, in quality of rearguard. Finally he is not at all clearly what he meant by "*mass*": Presumably it was a matter of the portion of infantries that was not possible to embark at Benghazi, but the issue of the evacuation via sea would have deserved very greater organization or at least the indication of the units to start on the port of Benghazi. For before this order, Cona unable to show the absolute impossibility to guarantee the outflow of the battalions of infantry from Barce to Benghazi in the short time given him, but Tellera insisted: "*the situation imposes that your movement must absolutely begin this night. Guaranteed*". To tell the truth also this telegram does not seem made in order to illuminate the ideas: on one flank there was the implicit impending enemy threat (also what of the unsaid entity and the presumable objective), by belittling the weight of the same threat limiting the order to the simple beginning of the outflow in the nocturnal arc. In compensation for the shipping deduced that all the dismounted troops could have made use of rail shipment and the later evacuation via sea. Cona taken this for a bond and returned to strike the nail of the three motorized columns:

I do not say movement not possible from current alignment until

Agedabia given excess distance especially for armored units which each day movement would not have to exceed km. 60. Therefore if not received my proposal which today is 774, I will execute movement to the Benghazi area tomorrow maintaining for day the occupation el Abiar-Regima to protection of the flank " ⁽²⁷⁾.

Telleria ended in order to accept this point of view:

"It is well for your movement that must but press south of Benghazi approaching Ghemines. Establish with the motorized units protection immediately north of Benghazi against threats from Tocra. You are to keep in mind on the next night you will absolutely have to reach Agedabia. The location of Gen. Bignami remains unchanged" ⁽²⁸⁾.

Perhaps against this clarification, perhaps for the consideration that in a device of safety in march the parts very are defined, Cona determined to join with the Villanis column, that is proper reserves, and circulated the orders for the transfer from the area of Barce and that of Benghazi - Ghemines (sketch n. 23). Also now from the enemy side an attack of a unit was had only armored cars against units of rearguard lined up on the 3rd position, to east of Barce, obstruction of the roadway: the initiative was rejected and the enemy endured the loss of some means. The rail shipment until to Benghazi of the first block of infantry happened regularly. At 21:00 the Commander of XX Corps departed Barce in his turn.

5 February.

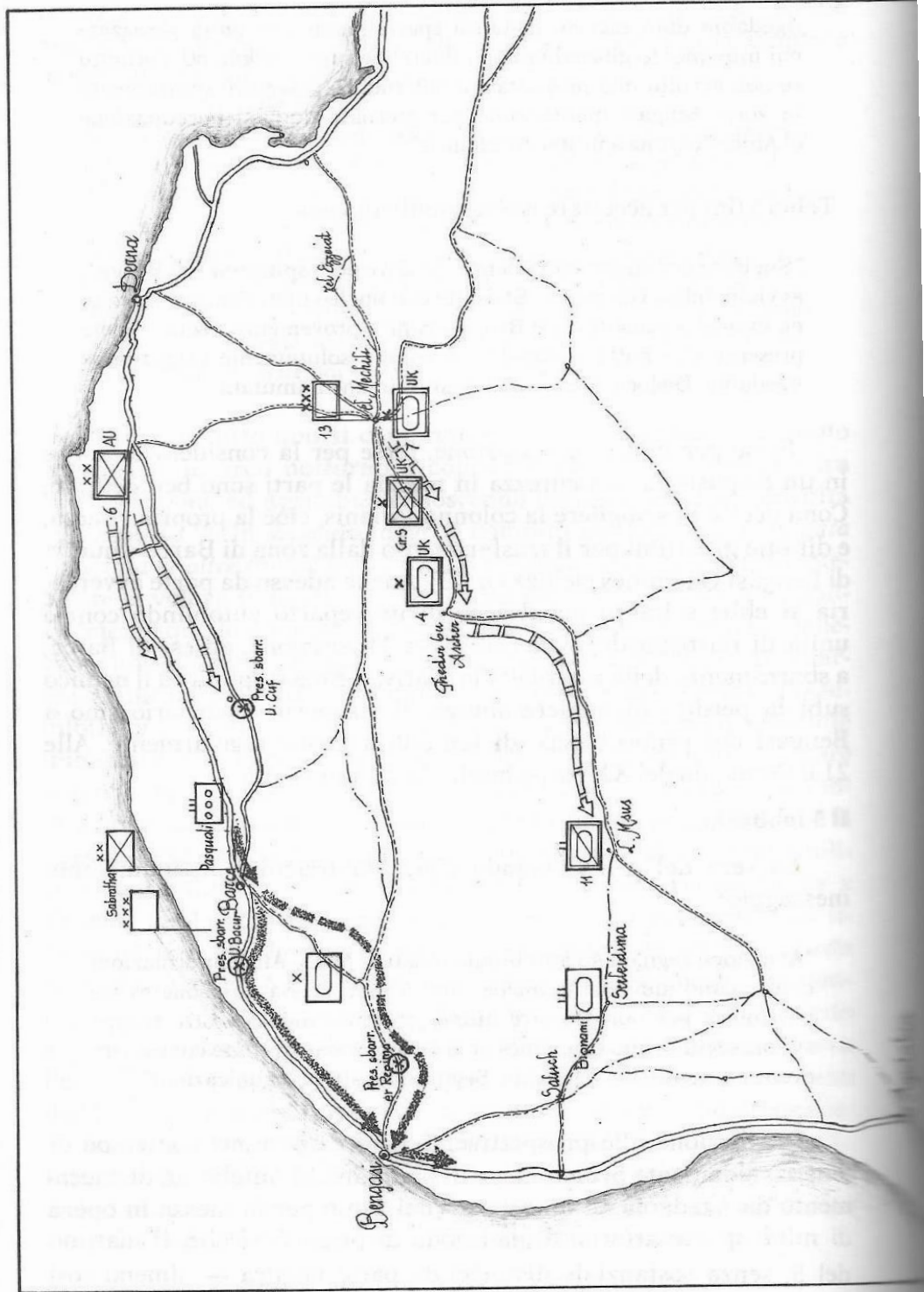
The evening of the 4th the Commander of the Army transmitted to an alarming message:

"Aviation signals 46 armored cars at Zauiet Msus. Other information also confirm movement tanks same direction very dangerous for us. It is necessary therefore that movement your troops is continued until Ghemines & that troops are ready to continue eventually until Agedabia. Other communications will follow" ⁽²⁹⁾.

In relation to the perspectives, Telleria decided to keep firmly holding Sceleidima and sending to Antelat a detachment from Agedabia and a engineer unit for the putting in work of mines scattered around that node of tracks. So that, the morning of the 5th, without substantial disturbance from enemy side - at least therefore it was thought by the Army Commander - the new situation could

Schizzo n. 23

SITUAZIONE ALLE ORE 18 DEL 4 FEBBRAIO 1941



therefore to be reassumed:

- Pasquali grouping at el-Coefia, approximately 15 kilometers to the north of Benghazi;
- Eastern Libya Rearguard (new title of the Bergonzoli column) in Regima area, approximately 30 kilometers to east of Benghazi. Comprising also the Ferrara group ⁽³⁰⁾.
- Bignami Grouping ⁽³¹⁾, already reserve of the Comando Superiore and then of the Command of the Army, at Sceleidima, one some thirty of kilometers to the east of Ghemines.

It does not turn out having been circulated an organic operations order, in any case the cited troops realized an emergency against the arrival of the 6th Australian Division from the *gebel* (the Pasquali grouping and Eastern Libya rearguard), is against the arrival of the 7th Armored Division from Zauet el Hammana-el Abiar (Eastern Libya rearguard) as well as from Zauet Msus (Bignami grouping and the detachment of Agedabia). Finally, at Agedabia a garrison of a sure consistency existed ⁽³²⁾, constituted quickly by the Comando Superiore, that it would have integrated the safety deployment. Except in this deployment existed in an unexpected hole. The order to press until to the crossroads of Antelat seems has been received by Col. Aimone-Cat only towards 10:00 of the 5th, therefore the engineer unit sent late to the place had to find that the locality was already in English hands. It is difficult much to accept that an inexplicable inertia appears. The orders for the occupation of Antelat, determining with aim of the protection of the withdrawal of the army, did not have the clear pressing incisiveness dictated by the situation. In part the consideration was that it *had* to be executed during the night of the 5th and that the army Command of had to worry to receive confirmation before the first light of the dawn, must admit that however the force of the detachment sent (a Libyan motorized machinegun company) would have allowed a resistance hardly little more than symbolic. Probably Tellera did not have the exact perception of what could happen. Therefore the conclusive phrase of the message is only explained with which in the night of the 5th he informed Graziani of the provisions *taken* (among which is the occupation of Antelat): "*On the whole, in spite of this threat, I still think situation is good*" ⁽³³⁾.

So-called "mass" of the troops in withdraw was something extremely heterogamous and confused and whose single description is sufficient to indicate how much energy and clarity of views demanded the good outcome of the operation. Part of it was airborne: the Commanders of the 10th Army, the XX Army Corps and of the

60th *Sabratha* Division, some units of the 85th and 86th Infantry, the Della Bona column, the 10th Bersaglieri and elements from the Fort of Benghazi and the Intendenza, for a total of approximately 5,000 men. Another 15,000 men were scattered among Barce - Benghazi - Ghemines - Soluch awaiting a means of transport: the greater part of the 60th *Sabratha*, the machine-gun battalions of the 25th *Brescia* and the 55th *Savona*, various support and services elements of the 10th Army, the XX Corps and of Benghazi. For this mass on foot neither an evacuation plan nor an outflow order seems to have been prepared. Arrival of collapse the possibility of embarking at Benghazi, evidently the problem of the evacuation had become irresolvable and it did not remain any hope to use in more trips by the trucks available, after having concentrated all at the railroad means in the area of Soluch-Ghemines.

These immediate previous to the battle of Beda Fomm ⁽³⁴⁾. Before passing to the exposure of the action a note seems opportune on the place where it was carried out. From Ghemines to Agedabia 105 kilometers, indicated by mile stones with origin point at Agedabia and therefore with increasing progression run towards the north. The via Balbia can be considered the median line of a strip of level land from the ten to the twenty kilometers wide and delimited to east by the *Sassoso* desert and the West by the sea. Between the coastal roadway and loose sandy dunes the track adducing to the fort of ez-Zuetina, at a height of 30 km. Of this strip the longitudinal section comprised between 70 km and 30 km constituted the battlefield. In particular, the fight infuriated in correspondence of two obstructions operated by the English: to south in the pass at km 37, to north more or less to the heights of 55 km.

At 08:00 of 5 February Gen. Della Bona was introduced to the Commander of XX Corps in Benghazi in order to receive orders. Gen. Cona perceived that the English mechanized patrols had been spotted at Msus and decided that Allegros unit was to move immediately to Soluch in order to watch the origins from east. The reason of the provision is not known, but it is from finding that at Sceledeima, a point of forces passage, was already found the Bignami column, therefore the presence of the Allegros unit at Soluch assumed insufficient meaning. In any case in a cycle of approximately two hours things changed. At 09:00 Cona communicated to Bergonzoli - deployed at el-Abiar - the imminence of the resumption of the withdrawal on Agedabia. Therefore it was opportune that before dusk he began the movement of his column, in which the VI medium Tank Battalion would have been absorbed, located to the east of Benghazi. *"The Armored Brigade will be the rearguard"*

of the Army Corps" he added ⁽³⁵⁾. Then at 09:40, after a talk with Tellera, decided to start the Allegros unit and the 10th Bersaglieres to Agedabia. Della Bona hurried to send a message to Col. Moricca, commander of the 10th Bersaglieres:

"To modify the orders previously given at to the Allegros unit. By order of the Army Headquarter the 10th Bersaglieres with the Allegros unit must move at once to Agedabia. I recommend performance of safety measures against aerial attacks"
⁽³⁶⁾.

It was not enough. Shortly after Tellera summoned Della Bona ⁽³⁷⁾ and, in the presence of Cona, reiterated the order about where you take command of the defense of Ajdabiya, with the two units facing to the northeast, but "*respecting the defense action of Colonel Aimone-Cat and the functions of his special assignment*" ⁽³⁸⁾. The Moech and Colpani groupings had to be ready to go by noon on orders that would have been given directly from the Commander of the Army to the two commanders. Della Bona left Benghazi with his Chief of Staff and arrived at Ghemines before noon ⁽³⁹⁾. The units were ready. Seeing them moving to leave in its turn, the convoy went back and at 14:45 he passed the Allegros unit. At 15:00 arrived at Agedabia, where he found Col. Moricca that, on own initiative, had preceded the regiment.

It must underline some very important aspects of the action command in general. Given that certainly all the players have decided to have a great reason to act as they acted without any doubt the overall picture appears hardly acceptable.

The first order of Gen. Con at (08:00 hours) to transfer immediately to the Allegros unit from Ghemines to Solluch does not seem to have been executed with much solicitude, inasmuch as later (09.40 hours) still found the unit at Ghemines. In contrast, the second order was reiterated by the commander of the army personally, probably to widen the view, but Tellera - at least according to the report of Della Bona - not only flew over the issue of competence of the Army Commander: harmonization of the tasks already assigned to Col. Aimone-Cat with the defense of Agedabia in function of the safety of the withdraw, but, said nothing about the threat on Antelat. Moreover he removed to a higher court the decision made to leave the two artillery groupings, without not even explaining the reason.

What was the task of the small column that had to precede the army corps? According to the known orders it would seem to simply move to soon reach Agedabia to reinforce the defense. According to Cona, instead, it would have had to fulfill also the remaining function of vanguard regarding the troops of the army ⁽⁴⁰⁾. Gen. Della Bona, for his part, did not report the events in the report that he compiled on the events of 5 February, but later, in a letter addressed to Gen. Roatta, explained-indirectly - because he had not prescribed to Col. Moricca measures of safety against land attack. To his warning, land recon and safety could not explain that on the roadway in as much the employed motor vehicles (Fiat 326 and Lancia 3 Ro) that were unfit to move off road with a sure facility and, of the other part, *"it was a matter to do early in order to arrive at Agedabia before the English arrived and you speed to march that of the convoy could not therefore be to slow subordinated and methodical recon"*. To equipment of such thesis, Della Bona asserted that the only information on the enemy received by the Commander of XX Corps the morning of the 5th concerned the presence of a hundred of a trucks sighted just that morning by the air force in the area of Msus. The Commanders of the 5th Army and of XX Corps, instead, were in acquaintance since the afternoon of the 4th of the arrival of armored elements at Msus and movements begun towards the west (Sceleidima) and the south-west (Antelat), particularly important news. The issue appears unclear but certainly not thorough in his time, can not be answered now. The fact that the column is not considered a big edge that would follow during the retreat. The lack of precise orders and the belief that it was likely to be discarded the practical possibility of a substantial threat to the opponent from the East also led Gen. Della Bona to feel, at least for the moment, be exempted from having to follow in person the column. The same dispatch sent to Col. Moricca: *"(...) 10th Bersaglieri with the Allegrì unit must move immediately to Ajdabiya"* it could make to think that he meant to entrust the responsibility of the transfer to the Commander of the Regiment. If this were his intention, it was badly translated in the orders. As we have seen Della Bona had made his presence felt until his departure happened but we will see as any contact that had risen between the two units on march and combat will not more exist. The anticipated movement of the Commander of the 10th Bersaglieres, then, left without the head of the column, neither results that Gen. Della Bona has intervened in the matter. The absence of comments in his reports of the fact to find at Agedabia Col. Moricca would seem

to confirm the affirmation of this last to have preceded the regiment with consent of his superior. After all the battalions, in convoy on the only road, deprived of radio connection with the Allegros unit, will proceed towards south as for a logistical transfer, without worries of an encounter with the enemy.

Little before 15:00 Tellera signaled the situation of the troops at 14:30 to the Comando Superiore in reassuring terms:

"The Allegros Group & the 10th Bersaglieres near Agedabia. Moech Group ready & Colpani group to move to the Ghemines area. Paschal Group near Benghazi. Bergonzoli troops with the Armored Brigade begin the withdraw from Regima. Situation still good".

To be exact,, to that hour the Allegros unit was about forty kilometers from Agedabia and the 10th Bersaglieres at approximately fifty. The radio message was therefore unjustified imprecise or unjustified optimistic. The disconnect between reality and appreciation of events could not be more striking. The enemy had reached the battlefield. (map on the following pages).

As it has been said, O'Connor counted on resuming the advance between the 10th and 12 February. Already 1 February the aerial reconnaissance had marked the movements from Barce and Berta towards the west, but he was uncertain what they meant: was it a matter of a withdraw from the coastal area only or the prelude to a general withdrawn? It was in the afternoon of the following day that further information induced him to think it a withdraw on a much greater scale until then had been believed. He placed three pressing questions: could he afford the luxury to await the two tank regiments of the 2nd Armored Division? could the means of the 7th Armored Division be launch through 300 kilometers of desert? and, in the affirmative case, could he re-supply the division? O'Connor did not hesitate to long: the 7th Armored would go ahead as long as it was in conditions for proceeding. As far as the refueling, the first convoys loaded at Tobruk were arriving at Mechili and, all added, thought of being able to count on four or five days of autonomy. The same evening of the 2nd Gen. Creagh received the warning and the next morning operational orders to reach Msus, as soon as, the logistic situation permitted, Soluch and Ghemines. The task was clearest: to block all the Italian forces to north of said locality, preventing, at the same time, any attempt to break off the encirclement from the south.

**ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE BRITISH XIII CORPS
TO THE DATE OF 4 FEBRUARY**

XIII Corps Command (Lt. Gen. R.N. O' Connor)
7th Armored Division (Maj. Gen. M. O'Moore Creagh):

4th Armored Brigade (brig. J S.L. Caunter):

3rd Hussars
7th Hussars
2nd *Royal Tanks*
one battery antitank
one field battery

7th Armored Brigade (brig. H.E. Russel):

1st *Royal Tanks*
one Field artillery section

Support Group (brig. W H.E. Gott):

I bgt. *King's Royal Rifle Corps*
I bgt. French motorized
two squadrons of 11th Hussars
1st horse artillery (Field Art.)
one antiaircraft battery
antitank one battery

Divisional Units:

11th Hussars (less two squadrons of the *King's Dragoon Guard*)
II bgt. *Rifle Brigade*
4th horse artillery (Field Art.)
2nd Engineer squadron
141st Heavy field Art.

6th Australian Division (Maj. Gen. I.G. Mackay):

17th Infantry Brigade (brig. S.G. Savige):
2/5th battalion
2/6th battalion
2/7th battalion
I bgt. *Cheshire Regiment*

19th Infantry Brigade (brig. H.C.H. Robertson):

- 2/4th battalion
- 2/8th battalion
- 2/9th battalion
- I bgt. *Royal Northumberland Fusiliers*
- a Field Art. battery
- a antiaircraft battery
- a antitank battery
- one engineer company

16th Infantry Brigade (brig. A.S. Allen) at Tobruk

- 2/1st battalion
- 2/2nd battalion
- 2/3rd battalion
- a antitank battery
- one engineer company

Divisional Units:

- 51st field artillery brit
- three Heavy Art. batteries brit.
- a antitank battery brit.
- a antiaircraft battery brit.
- 1st Australian artillery
- 2nd Australian artillery
- 3rd Australian artillery
- one company Australian engineer
- one Australian company communal park
- one squadron 11th Hussars
- 6th Australian cavalry regiment
- 7th *Royal Tanks* (only personal at Tobruk)
- 10th *Royal Tanks* (false tanks)

army corps Support:

- 104th horse artillery (Field)
- a antiaircraft battery
- three engineer companies

Aviation of cooperation with the army:

- 6th and 208th squadron *Royal Air Force*
- 5th squadron *Royal Australian Air Force*.

For its part, the 6th Australian Division, the other arm of the pincers, had to press their own advancing with the maximum impulse.

The activity of that day was frantic. The aerial recon confirmed the Italian outflow from the *gebel* and his localized convoys directed towards Benghazi his armored formations (the Babini brigade) in the area of Barce, sending on them the participation of the *Blenheim*. While the abandonment of the airports of the western Cyrenaica had carried unavoidably to the absence of Italian aviation from the sky of the battle, squadrons of *Wellington* based at Malta had bombed the port of Tripoli and the base of Castel Benito. Commander Collishaw could employ also the fighter groups on the remainder of the 10th Army. While, in order to supply support directly to the 7th Armored Division, he ordered the transfer to Mechili at drawn of *Lysander* and of *Hurricane* from the cooperation group for the army.

On 4 February O'Connor, that had just moved the Command to Mechili, himself went to Tmimi in order to speak with Wavell, who arrived by airplane from Cairo. He espoused his thoughts and some of them received the unconditioned approval. At dawn of that morning the last action of the campaign was begun. Two squadrons of the 11th Hussars and one of the *King's Dragoon Guards*, just arrived from the area of the Canal, the march opened on a land that on purpose had not been previously reconnoitered for fear attracting the Italian attention. And that land was truly difficult, at least for the first 80-100 kilometers: spikes of cliffs emerging and steep walls of *uidian* were such to provoke not only a certain slowness of movement but other damage to the vehicles. When, later, O'Connor followed the division, seeing continuously firm means to sides of the track, he avoided an expectant question: *My God - he asked to Gen. Dorman-Smith, who accompanied he - do you believe that we will make it " (41)*.

Behind the armored cars proceeded the 4th Armored Brigade with 50 *cruisers* and 95 light tanks, then the artillery and the II battalion of the *Rifle Brigade*. At 15:00 the led squadron reached Msus, then, while the *King's Dragoon Guards* was stopped in place, the Hussars continued on to Antelat. At dawn of the 5th the entire the 7th Armored Division was found concentrated little to east of Msus. Now increasingly clear intention of Graziani appeared to evacuate Cyrenaica and Creagh O'Connor urged to speed 'up the advance to cut the Italian retreat. Creagh was decided to entrust the task to a small tactical group fully motored and therefore faster than the armored units. So, after receiving

further news from: aerial recon of columns in motion from Benghazi to Ghemines, a second decision is taken: to move the bulk of the division on Antelat in order to block the roadway at the heights of that locality, to launch towards Sceleidima-Soluch the support group and the 7th Armored Brigade. It was the crucial movement for the English success and the drama of the 10th Army.

The interception force practically delivered up that morning at Antelat, when the two squadrons of the 11th Hussars were reached by the squadron of the *King's Dragoon Guards*, by the II battalion of the *Rifle Brigade*, by the 4th horse artillery and the two antitank batteries of the 106th horse artillery, that is, after all, by nearly all the divisional units. It assumed the title of *Combeforce*, from the name of the commander of the 11th Hussars, and very soon it was given the optimal test. Towards 12:40 the first patrol coming from Bir er Ramtia reached the via Balbia more or less at 37 km and signaled "scarce traffic", At 14:00 approximately a rifle company offered itself as material to obstruct the roadway, while the Hussars kept off the road in order to prevent the encircling of the blockade, the rest of the riflemen formed a screen to the position of the artillery. Evidently, at the beginning the Hussars did not want to reveal themselves: among the few motor vehicles in circulation they let to pass the car of Gen. Della Bona; but seen to arrive a unit of a sure consistency (the Allegros unit) and signaled the flowing of a convoy of a greater entity (the 10th Bersaglieres), opened fire. The Allegros unit reacted and passed without some difficulty. Probably just for this it did not have doubts on the safety of the rear of the 10th Bersaglieres, which constituted the vanguard, and continued on to Agedabia.

The reports are vague and discordant on hours and facts. Gen. Della Bona asserted in his report: "*At 14:45 hours approximately I surpassed, the 30 km marker, Lt. Col. Allegros (...). I stopped to confer with the Lt. Col. then I continued. At 15:00 Hours approximately I reached Agedabia*", but in the message telegraphed to the Commander of the XX Corps at 16:00 he wrote: "*Enemy armored cars made actions of disturbance on roadway towards 35 km approximately 15:30 hours. Allegros Group took regular part captured one armored car and two prisoners*" ⁽⁴²⁾. Now, the 35 km marker is more to north of the point in which the foretold talk had taken place, therefore the contrast between the two messages is clear. The dispatch can be taken for good, but not for the hour. In fact the precise report of Lt. Col. Allegros were introduced at Agedabia at 15:30. In short, holding account also of the testimonies of British part, the short combat of

the Allegros unit must have place in the pass of the 37 km marker, where the track of Bir er Ramtia is grafted in the via Balbia, between 14:30 and 15:00, that is before that the English obstruction had assumed consistency (sketch n. 24).

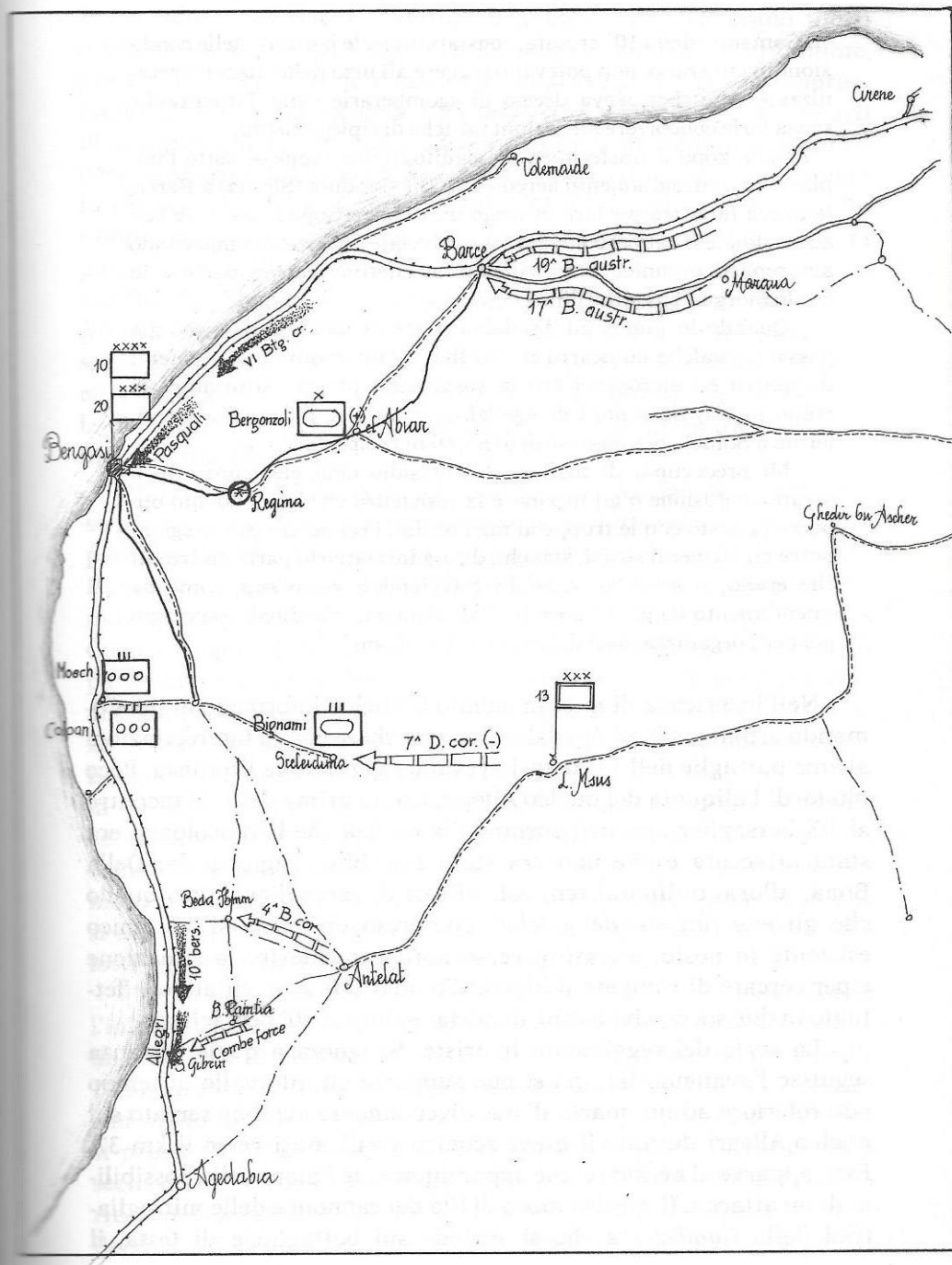
At Agedabia Gen. Della Bona it had naturally made contact at once with the commander of the south-Cyrenaica territory, Col. Aimone-Cat, whose jurisdiction extended also to the garrisons of Gialo, Marada and el-Agheila. In case he had not received reinforcements, he explained, he had to clear all and to withdraw on Sirte. Then he supplied some comparisons on the local situation. The last aircraft of the R. Aeronautica had left the field in the late morning headed to Tripolitania, except one *ghibli*, taking off shortly before noon for a recon towards the northeast, had reported that the British means in the area of Antelat were as numerous "as ants". There was of that still seriously worry for the defense of Agedabia and the safety of the column in motion. Circa the first point Della Bona gave some instructions to Col. Moricca for the dispositions to assume now; for the second, strangely, he did not show alarm, as some of it was not known when, at 15:25, he came to perceived that a Bersagliere motorcyclist had communicated he had fallen under fire on the via Balbia. "*I did not give weight to the event*" he admitted. Little later but Lt. Col. Allegros arrived and this time, in the forefront of the news of a sure British presence on the coastal strip, he was ordered to return towards north, meeting the 10th Bersaglieres, a portion of the unit, remained holding the position in the village. Finally confirmed on paper the dispositions already given to Col. Moricca⁽⁴³⁾. It seems that these have raised *difficulty which he said he would communicate directly to the Army*, therefore at 16:30 Della Bona delivered to Moricca a new and more formal message, quite appealing those orders of Tellera⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The episode is a very meaningful one of the sense of the provisional nature of command and uncertainty that the continuous resource to frequently modify complex tactical formations, the deficiency of respect for the hierarchical prerogatives and the insufficient precision of the orders had engendered in the units, in a moment already of much difficulty and when around the units still to the handle a painful climate of disorder was being delineated if not more worse. In merit the same Della Bona was sufficiently eloquent. After having pointed out the lengthening endured by his own column during the movement from Ghemines, measure lengthening which had of antiaircraft assurance but "*emphasized the numerous military and civil trucks that on the roadway*

The battle of Beda Fomm. The situation at 15:00 of 5 February

Schizzo n. 24

BEDA FOMM
LA SITUAZIONE ALLE ORE 15 DEL 5 FEBBRAIO



chaotically spun towards the south" he wrote:

"To Commander of the 10th Army, found that the infantry, in the condition they were in, they could not withstand the shock of mass mechanized enemy, had decided to evacuate them to Tripolitania, without having to allow the tactical actions of withdraw.

Therefore, after the transfer executed in two stages - under the relentless aerial strafing - from Bir Gandula (Slonta) to Barce, he had made them to transport in train from Barce to Soluch, from where with convoys they would have had to be under way on Sirte. But lacking organic truck companies, the movement was carried out only in part and inorganic and disorderly.

Once I reached Agedabia sent of such troops which already made passage; some trucks fully loaded with disintegrated and heterogeneous elements which were waiting in the fort. Other parts were in en route to north of Agedabia, while the mass was still waiting at Soluch, for lack of transport means.

I preoccupied myself to remove from the garrison each element which could create confusion or to crack the resistance that I would have had to defend the place with the troops under my orders. I made therefore at once clear the shaken, tired, disorganized elements and in part disarmed that was in waiting at Agedabia, starting them out towards the south, as for understanding of the 10th Army. Such elements, reordered, served then for the organization of the strong point of Homs.

(45)

In the uncertainty of that moment the unit information the Army Headquarter, already at Agedabia, informed that according to interceptions some patrols of the 11th Hussars had reached the coast. Little later the portion of the Allegros unit, which escape the first encounter at 16:00 of the 10th Bersaglieres, returned carrying the news that the convoy had been attacked and that it had not been possible to reach them. Della Bona, then, ordered Lt. Col. Allegros to collect all which remained of the unit, including one M 13 tank, the only one existing at the post, and to go back towards north in order to clear the situation and in order to try to clear the blockade. This was the only attempt, carried out in two successive times was, to carry aid to the 10th Bersaglieres.

The fate of the regiment was sad. It is ignored what distance it followed the vanguard, but an interval of not less than a quarter hour of time can be supposed, otherwise would have come on the Allegros unit during the short action checking them towards the 37 km marker. They appeared to the enemy as apparently unaware of the possibility of an attack. The precise fire of row of the guns and the machine-guns of the *Combe force* that was unleashed on the XXIV Battalion in front,

made the void quickly. The battalion, the commander fallen, reduced to about sixty men. The others were died or the wounded, fled or captured. The motor vehicles, destroyed or in flames, lay on the roadway and here and there off the road. A little later arrived the rest of the column: the XXXV and XVI battalions with the units of support. In spite of the surprise, when the enemy resumed fire the reaction was fast and was decided to attempt to force the obstruction. The commander of the XXXV battalion, Lt. Col. Pisciotta, had assumed the command of the regiment, made to dismount the men and tried to force a passage to the west of the via Balbia. Except the commander of the II battalion of the *Rifle Brigade*, suspicious of the movement, carried on to the left of the company lined up across the road a second support company and the Bersaglieres came to fall under a most effective fire of infantry while the English guns continued to bombard the motor vehicles of the column.

While at 15:30 Tellera had decided to withdraw of the mass and ordered Cona to then start towards the south "*at all speed*" the Moech and Colpani groupings and the Pasquali group. Also the Bignami column, that at 15:00 had communicated of being in contact with enemy patrols, this last was under command of XX Corps. Cona, therefore, decided that the foretold artillery groupings were departing at 16:00 and that Gen. Bignami held Sceleidima until 20:00, then retreated for Soluch on Agedabia covering the rear. The troops of Bergonzoli, in the rearguard, had to abandon Benghazi with the last elements at 19:30. It was so that at 17:00 approximately the Colpani-Moech column, in which military and civil trucks and buses which it had become in part loaded, reached the 10th Bersaglieres, by now in crisis. Some batteries were able to take to position but found it very difficult to disentangle themselves from the traffic jam that had been created. One adds that lacking an organic fight direction each commander had to act by initiative.

After a half hour of combat, Lt. Col. Combe requested the intervention of the 4th Armored Brigade in the area of Beda Fomm, a score of kilometers more to north. Gen. Caunter, arrived at 16:30 at Antelat, immediately ordered the participation of the 7th Hussars reinforced by a squadron of *cruisers* of the 2nd *Royal Tanks*. The unit rushed along the track of Beda Fomm and at 18:00 burst on the scene a trifle above of the long tail of the column in withdraw. In spite of the certain existing disorder in the Italian rows, the arrival of the 7th Hussars was timely because it relieved the *Combe* group

from a pressure that was increasing and dangerous. The raging of the English tanks, than moved up and down, parallel with the road, upset the residual aggressiveness. Only the falling of the night, introducing a long pause in the combat, allowing a certain reordering.

At 17:30, after to having given instruction and deliveries to the civil and religious authorities of Benghazi, the Commanders of the Army and XX Corps left the city, in total dark he was successfully on the Via Balbi, between 60 and 40 km . It was at 19:00 that some officers of Command of the 60th *Sabratha* Division, remained behind, Gen. Cona felt the fate of the 10th Bersaglieres. The two Commanders made a short pause at Ghemines in order to estimate the situation, and then resumed the march. Immediately there appeared the first negative signs of the development of the events: a series of military and civil worn out motor vehicles of that, already directed to Agedabia, and had broken down on the way trying to escape the encirclement. Exceeded, then, the Paschal group on the height of Sidi Ahmed el-Magrum and proceeding between tens of carcasses of vehicles in flames or abandoned, towards 20:30 Tellera and Cona reached the 55 km. Here they were arrested against the tail of the Moech grouping, delayed on the roadway for approximately three hours because Col. Colpani had been found involved in the fray. Gen. Cona tried to gather an idea of the situation. Some news on the enemy he did not have but to deduce it was a matter of a large portion of the "*Armored Corps*" that the S.I.M. had given as present. Possibilities of a breakthrough frankly did not appear in those circumstances. The 10th Bersaglieres had semi-disappeared, the two artillery groupings found themselves bottled on the roadway, the moral of the troops was decidedly depressed, between units and elements of varied origin existed a great confusion, all in short induced to consider with insufficient confidence an action of force, especially if not maneuvered. But something had to be done and, to his warning, was one good card to play: part of the garrison of Agedabia could carry out a thrust for the north at the dawn of the next day. The surprised factor could grant what he could not give the fractional forces. In truth the attempt was more based on the desperation than on calculation. From Agedabia, of which one knew the entity of the garrison and the screen held towards Antelat, it could not be thought to see to reach that of the Allegros unit (of which he was ignorant of the residual consistency) slightly reinforced: truly little. In any case it was an attempt not to neglect.

Its not that, while the executive formalities were realized,

the news was reaching that the units of Agedabia had begun withdrawn after an order of the Comando Superiore. Such withdraw of said origin received a hard comment from part of Gen. Cona: *"On the authenticity of the order of the withdraw the Comando Superiore in the Sirtica they had expressed founded doubts in as much as such order, demanded very late by the Comando Superiore to the garrison Commander of Agedabia was not ever preformed"*. For it certain turns out that Graziani - informed from the Commander of the army of the English presence at Antelat, of the order given by Tellera to Col. Aimone-Cat to send a strong detachment to Antelat and of the situation at 14:30 hours (defined by Tellera *"still good"*) - the commander of South Cyrenaica territory oriented on the probable enemy objective, the Coast, and the arraigned to take all the measures of the case, watching carefully the routes from north and the northeast.

Gen. Della Bona, after having postponed the encounter with the 10th Bersaglieres the Allegros unit, was receiving information that made him think the worse. At 19:30 an officer of the aeronautical engineers reported that all the Balbia between the 70 km and the 30 km was occupied by English armored cars and that in order to pass was having to cast themselves on the track long the coast. Little later there arrived another officers with some motor vehicles and informed that a about fifty armored car, emerged unexpectedly a few tens of meters from the road, had opened a violent fire against the services column of the 60th *Sabratha* Division, as well as civil courier and means of the air force. Some vehicles, escaped from the road towards the sea in a group about forty of kilometers from Agedabia, returned to the costal towards the 30 km succeeding to arrive at Agedabia. At 21:00 approximately a radio interception revealed that English had already captured more than a thousand prisoners. Finally Lt. Col. Allegros returned communicating of going back until to the 40 km without having found anything, neither Italian nor English, but carcasses of trucks. It is extremely doubtful the exactitude of indication "km 40" since in that area were positioned the enemy horse batteries, however Della Bona believed by now exhausted the task and allowed that Col. Aimone-Cat *"regulated the orders according to receipts from the Superiore Comando"*. Graziani came to acquaintance of the events from a telegram sent from Aimone-Cat the morning of the 6th: *"Enemy Interceptions gave at 20:00 hours news of the capture of many guns and arms. The last elements escaped, abandoning the road towards sea, journeyed to Agedabia 22:00 hours. With the twelve trucks available and truck nuclei & serviceable squadrons arranged for the withdrawal of five batteries on el Agheila. Agedabia*

bombed violently 22:00 hours. Begun march 24:00 hours. Arrived el Agheila 05:00 hours. Gen Della Bona will reach ... Sirte". In a following report, Col. Aimone-Cat specified that towards 23:00 hours, seeing the situation irreparable and since gen. Della Bona had left him freedom of action, he had decided to retire, sending the Marada unit to el-Agheila awaiting the forces of Gialo. For his part Gen. Della Bona wrote in his report: *"Before giving way to me I returned with my only Chief of the General Staff to the obstruction place in the first houses of Agedabia and, stated that nothing more had arrived from the north, I gave - midnight as the last - the none auction of the Aimone-Cat column for the departure for el-Agheila".*

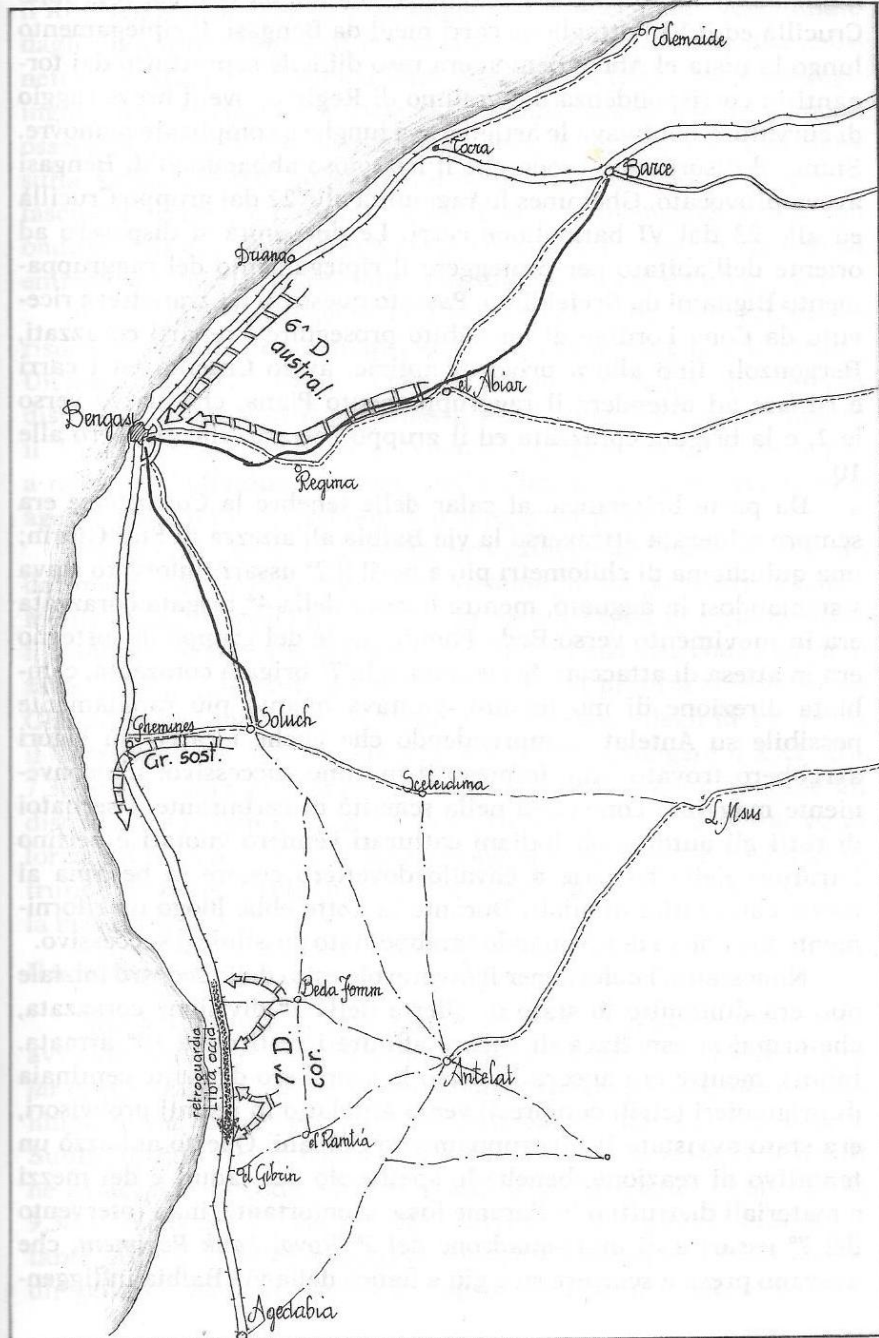
To that part, the situation really appeared very difficult and not susceptible of immediate improvement since, among other things, the enemy had the full possibility to maneuver off road, and a strong tactical advantage that conferred to them. For more - it helps to repeat - a disordered and scared multitude of military of various agencies and civilians that had mixed with the column in withdraw, provoking confusion and difficulty: pertaining to military units were varied, with the work companies and the services of the Intendenza; it was personal of the air force and navy; were men, women and children escaping from Benghazi; it was, we say also this, the result of a bad organization of the withdraw. Towards 22:00 (sketch n. 25), while at the head of the column some batteries off the road carried out actions of obstruction and arrest, Gen. Cona sent orders to Generals Bergonzoli and Bignami to send ahead at once one M 13 Tank Battalion or, at least, one company. Tellera approved of and prescribed that if the tanks were to arrive before 04:00 of the morning he would attack at dawn for forcing a passage; in the contrary case a protective stopped deployment would have been assumed. The said deployment was put into effect starting from 03:30.

Gen. Bignami, that in the late afternoon had rejected some thrusts of English patrols at 20:30 had cleared Sceleidima and, exceeded Soluch - which was by now evacuated - reaching Ghemines towards midnight. Introducing himself at once on the coastal strip, set in line the Pasquali group. But he had with them only the machine-gun battalion and the artillery group: the XXI medium Tank Battalion, the more precious element, had been allowed, on precise received advanced dispositions received timely, in cause of its limited speed. So, that the tanks of Bignami reached Soluch at 04:00 and Ghemines at 06:00. As far as Gen. Bergonzoli, his

The battle of Beda Fomm. The situation at 22:00 of 5 February

Schizzo n. 25

BEDA FOMM
LA SITUAZIONE ALLE ORE 22 DEL 5 FEBBRAIO



column had been put in march at sunset: the Piana grouping, the Ferrara group and Armored Brigade ⁽⁴⁶⁾ from el-Abiar; the Commander of the Eastern Libya Rearguard from Benina; the Crucillà group and the VI medium Tank Battalion from Benghazi. The withdrawing along the track el Abiar-Benina was rendered difficult above all from the hairpin curves in correspondence of the pass of Regima, where the short radius of curving obligated the artilleries a long and complicated maneuver. Being that the disorganized exodus that the hasty abandonment of Benghazi had provoked, Ghemines was reached at 22:00 by the Crucillà group and at 23:00 by the VI Tank Battalion. The two units were deployed to east of the town in order protect the withdraw of the Bignami grouping from Sceleidima. After this, at midnight, and accommodated by Cona the order to make at once to continue the armored units, Bergonzoli, until then lacking news, started Crucillà and the tanks and remained to await the Piana grouping, that arrived towards 02:00, and the Armored Brigade and the Ferrara group, that arrived at 10:00.

From the British side, the decreasing of the darkness the *Combe force* was always deployed across the Balbia way at the height of Sidi Gibrin; fifteen or so kilometers more to north the reinforced the 7th Hussars was arranging themselves in ambush, while the rest of the 4th Armored Brigade was in motion towards Beda Fomm; part of the support group was waiting to attack Sceleidima and 7th Armored Brigade, changed movement direction, headed as quickly as possible at Antelat, comprising that also the most worn out tank would have found useful employment the next morning, the greater disadvantage consisted in the sparsely of fuel, the tanks of all the captured Italian motor vehicles were emptied and even the tractors of the horse batteries had to yield their gas to the medium armor and armored cars. During the night a refueling had taken place but it was not said when the next one would have been possible.

In spite of the euphoria for the favorable outcome of the initial action was not diminished the state of alert of the 7th Armored Division, that by this time expected to see to flow the rests of the 10th Army. In fact, while it was still in course of evacuation of many hundreds of prisoners (including civilians) towards Antelat or in temporary fencings, it had sighted the Colpani grouping. This sketched a reaction attempt, although the show of fallen and destroyed means and materials or in flames it was discouraged, but the participation of the 7th Hussars and a the 2nd squadron of *Royal Tank Regiment*, that had taken to slide up and down to flank of the via Balbia inflicting

inflicting losses and seeding disorder, soon it extinguished every wish. In proximity of the roadway, to the about to the heights of 52 km, was found the Rus Ben Hagen, a import but round height called by the English *the Pimple* (il Foruncolo) and little more far away a hill lock with a white tomb, Sidi Ahmed Bu Lteief, called by the English *the Mosque* (la Moschea). The *Pimple* allowed good observation on the adjacent section of the via Balbia that crossed it on the left and for this it was to the center of bitter fights. Instead strip of surrounding land was sandy and level but with undulations that gave a certain cover to tracked means of both the sides without moreover to constitute obstacle to movement.

In order to lighten the pressure on the *Combe force*, Caunter resolved to constitute a new obstruction supported by the *Pimple*. A part of the 2nd *Royal Tanks*, the squadron already in place, was offered to "hull down" on the ridge, fronted to the via Balbia, while the 7th Hussar with a *cruiser* and 29 light tanks were moved still more to the north in order to characterize the tail of the column, what, in truth, little easy given the intermingling of units and means.

In the dark night, shaken by strong gusts of wind from the sea and from showers of rain, time passed slowly without one side or the other is trying to reignite the fighting. Unable to bear more impatience that tormented him, Gen. Tellera decided to return with his car to Ghemines personally to urge the arrival of the M 13. He found the VI Battalion, but obviously could not reach the XXI. At 7:30 he was back at km 55, where stood the Gen. Cona. The two generals discussed briefly, then Tellera wanted to renew the attempt to break the blockade with only the VI Battalion, without waiting for the remaining troops Bergonzoli, which would soon too, especially the Babini brigade.

6 February.

At the first light of that rainy day Gen. Caunter was informed that "*a colossal column, packed on the road, stretching as far as we could see*", a large enemy column, lock on the road, so long as not to end, were clear to seven-eight kilometers more to north. At once he ordered that A squadron that was blocking the head, the 7th Hussar to attack the tail and the 3rd Hussars to threaten the flank. At 09:30 the rest of the 2nd *Royal Tanks* arrived at Sidi Ahmed. It was a little late. At 08:45 the VI Tank Battalion directed itself towards the Rus Ben Hagen had moved off the road in the lozenge formation.

At seven hundred meters from the ridge, without warning, the head company saw to presented on the crest a line the gun tubes of the *cruisers* in ambush. In a few minutes eight M 13 had been knocked out of combat and two others, a little later, were immobilized hit in the flank and while they tried to escape. The led company did not exist any more.

But the attack continued threatened with turning from the east and A squadron was forced to retire on the ridge of Sidi Ahmed Bu Lteief. It newly opened the fire against a second company of M 13 and once again the shooting he was deadly: another seven tanks were arrested hit. The abandonment of the *Pimple* but had allowed the release of the roadway and the resumption of the movement towards the south. The VI battalion - or better its remains - passed in the led, proceeding in open formation on a 700-800 meter front, to the sides of the road; they followed the Colpani grouping, the Commanders of the 10th Army and the XX Army Corps, then the Pasquali and Moech groupings. The safety on the left flank was entrusted to the XXXIV Libyan Battalion, that moved along an undulation of the land parallel to the roadway. But it must not assume that the column had made a device marked by a precise plan tactical unfortunately the reality was different. The VI Battalion in fact given the low driving speed, was passed immediately by wheeled means; the Colpani and Moech groupings were intermingled persisted inserting disordered groups of various origins the security provided by the Libyan battalion was totally illusory.

At around 10:00 these troops reached the area where the 10th Bersaglieri had ceased all resistance. There was no one. Only the signs of defeat (sketch n. 26). A few hours earlier, at dawn under a heavy rain, the remnants of the regiment had made an extra effort with the support of the few cannons and accompanying part of Bersaglieres even on vehicles. But *Combe force* had now was fully able to acquire an strong enough array and, above all, its horse batteries well framed the battlefield. A locked fire is pulled down on the heap of bottled vehicles and still deployed troops were dispersed.

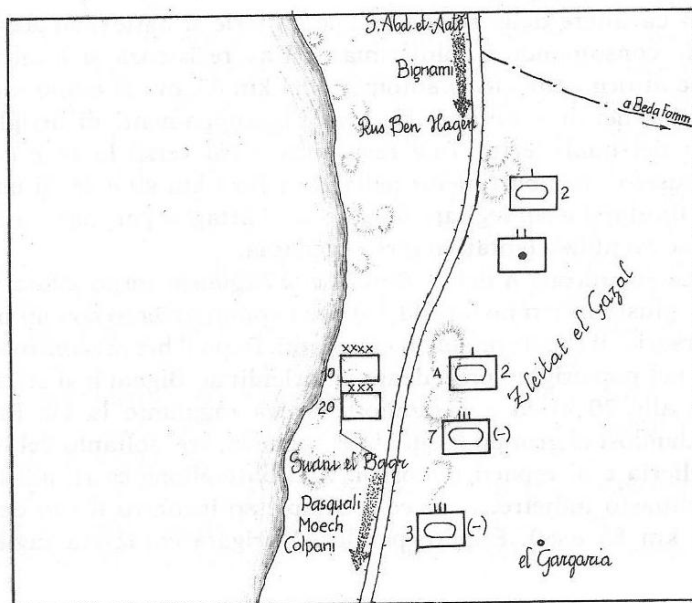
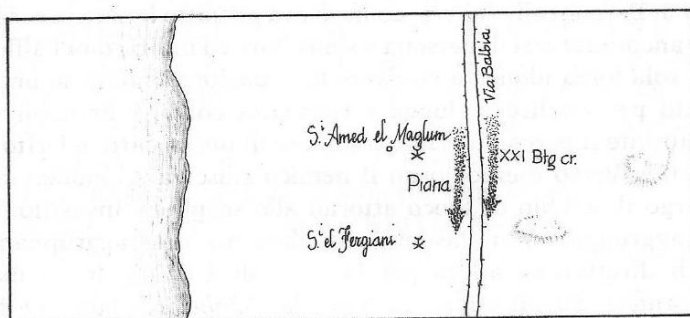
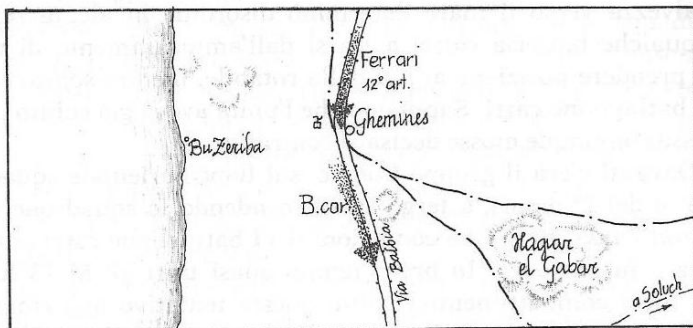
The Colpani grouping, therefore, continued slowly but soon had to stop. All that stood between 50 km and 40 km was enveloped in a whirlwind of fire, starting from the head quickly engulfed even the tail of the column.

The battle of Beda Fomm. The situation at 10:00 of 6 February

Schizzo n. 26

BEDA FOMM

LA SITUAZIONE ALLE ORE 10 DEL 6 FEBBRAIO



The sudden arrest gave rise to clogging, off road escapes and confusion. The disbanding of non-combatants in search of safety towards the sea determined disorder in some units, but some batteries succeeded to get out of the hoard of means and taking position to the sides of the roadway, while the VI Tank Battalion arrived. We know that the unit had already endured losses. The movements however decided to counterattack.

There was the *Combe* group, on the eastern flank squadrons of the 3rd and the 7th Hussars, to the rear coming down was A Squadron of the 2nd *Royal Tanks*. In these conditions VI Tank Battalion was condemned at the start. In short time nearly all the M 13 were knocked out of combat. This attempt failed it did not but remain to await the arrival of the Babini brigade with the other units of Bergonzoli. Tellera, as he had already done the previous evening, still wanted to approach in person to speed up and to address the affluence of the only suitable force to resolve the situation; he mounted a tank in order to go back along and compact immobilized column, but during the distance he came been involved in a action and was mortally wounded. Towards noon the enemy also succeeded to close from behind the circle of fire around the invested group. Part of the Pasquali grouping and elements of the Moech grouping then diverted for the track of Zuetina, between the sea and the coast. It was a small matter: the *Combe* force did not work hard to stop and disperse them.

A stride the road some batteries were struck tirelessly consuming the remained shots. Resistance was localized also around the Road House of the 45 km, where had collected some generals and soldiers of the two artillery groups, many of which were wounded. Such resistance stopped towards 14:00 and this concluded the fighting in the area between 40 and 45 km. The enemy made to limit themselves to watch the battlefield in order to prevent any eventual attempt towards Agedabia.

A squadron of the 2nd *Royal Tank Regiment* then returned towards north, just in time (11:15 hours) for the appointment with a new adversary: the Bignami grouping. After the short action supported in the afternoon previous at Sceleidima, Bignami had been come dislodged at 20:30 and at midnight he had reached the via Balbia, following behind the Pasquali group. He arranged, now, only the III/10th Artillery and of smaller units: the XXI Tank Battalion, slower, was to remain behind. The small group met its destiny between km 55 and 60. Nevertheless for the 4th English Armored Brigade

moment was not simple. A few Italian pieces, put at once in position, had begun to fire furiously against the *Pimple* eliminating two or three tanks and only the return of A Squadron as well as the entrance in action of a 25 pounder battery had succeeded to balance the situation. However the serious deficiency of ammunitions persisted and for cover Caunter ordered the 3rd and 7th Hussars to rage as best they could, above all taking advantage of the *cruisers* that each of them had been reinforced. Confronted with the usual raid on the left, the Bignami grouping quickly lost cohesion and disintegrated.

It was now the time of the Eastern Libya Rearguard. At dawn Bergonzoli has at Ghemines the elements of the Command and the Piana grouping. The Armored Brigade and the Ferrara group had just passed Benghazi. To the east the presence of the enemy was reported, from the south no news. At 08:00 it is decided to begin the movement at a slow pace in order to allow the Armored Brigade to close from behind. At 10:00 the head of the column had reached the 80 km marker, flanked on the left by the XXI Tank Battalion coming from Sceleidima-Soluch. Knowing that Gen. Cona had been attacked, Col. Piana accelerated the pace.

The first element that introduced itself to the eyes of the waiting English was an armored car of the 11th Hussars. After a moment of surprise it was an issue of a war prize and was quickly done away with. Caunter did not have many alternatives. He left the 2nd *Royal Tanks* operate just within, on the *Pimple*, a equalization of armor-piercing shells and still moved the 3rd Hussars to attack the flank of the column and the 7th Hussars to be employed on the tail. The batteries of Col. Piana they hurried to deploy and to open the fire on the *Pimple*. Its shooting was so lively and precise that four *cruisers* they were very soon the knocked out of service and induced the 2nd *Tanks* to withdraw - leaving on the field three another medium tanks - on Sidi Ahmed, where in the meantime it was joint the most waited for convoy of supplies. But the weight of the *cruisers* had been made to feel badly and the XXI Tank Battalion very was badly put. As soon as it appeared it had lost three M 13, then, after the action with the 2nd *Tanks*, was remained to face in a situation of inferiority the incursions of the Hussars and the fire of the English horse batteries. Towards 13:00 it was almost destroyed.

During a relative pause a motor vehicle with the wounded Gen Tellera had arrived from the south⁽⁴⁷⁾. Bergonzoli determined to continue the antitank effort with at the forefront some patrols of motorcyclists and guns

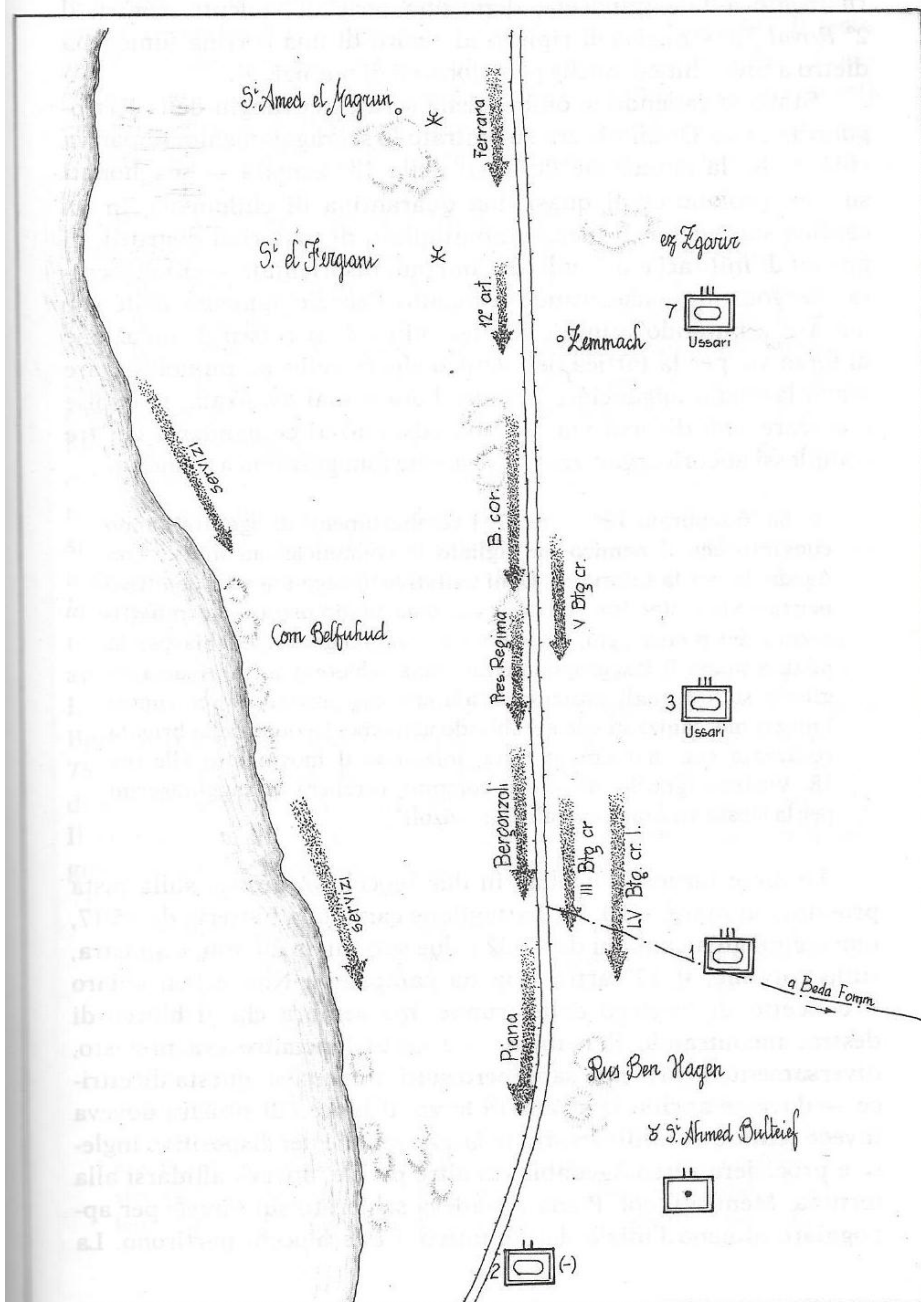
of the Piana grouping, in rear the Ferrara group and on the exposed flank, in double row, the LV light Tank Battalion to the outside and the III and V medium Tank Battalion to the inside (sketch n. 27). All the impediments and the services instead were started along the coastal track for Zuetina.

Caunter, in what he called "*the vital hours*", had repeatedly asked for the in flow for 1st *Royal Tank Regiment* of the 7th Armored Brigade, still at Antelat in divisional reserve, but was not pleased very soon because the regiment, remained with 11 *cruisers*, was to arrive at Antelat with much delay for difficulty of fuel supplies. At 14:30 the 2nd *Tanks*, in fact fully loaded with ammunition and fuels, initially tried to resume the *Pimple*, fallen into Italian hand, but after a vain attempt of encircling, deployed to obstruct the via Balbia a pair of kilometers to south of the knoll. The commander of the 4th Armored Brigade felt in growing the fever of the battle. To the north the 7th Hussars, than finally had found the tail of the column and it had thrown itself on it, they had been rejected with the loss of some tanks, whose crews had been captured. The 3rd Hussars, that had engaged the center, seeing the concentration, of the III and V Tank Battalions, were limited to maintain the contact. The horse batteries found difficulty since their observatory had been hit and, for against, the Italian artillery continued to demonstrate to the enemy to hold them in serious account. After all, the possibility that was clear the column of Bergonzoli intended in order to smash in the barrier with its weight alone. Also the *Combe force*, however, nourished some worry: many Italian units had eluded the lines of the *Rifle Brigade* through thrown across the dunes and slipping quickly along the beach. Where the rivulets had received a coordination and a guide could become a large problem to the rear of Combe. Unfortunately it was not so.

In any case the resolution of the fight had arrived seen to the height of Beda Fomm. The 1st *Royal Tank Regiment* just arrived (hours 15:45) faced the counterattack of the M 13 that, gathered by surprise, turned towards the sea. In the meantime, however, the two squadrons of the 2nd *Tanks* had been forced to retreat of some kilometer. At 16:00 a horse battery entered action at Sidi Ahmed and managed, with most effective fire, to allow with the 2nd *Tanks* to return to the street obstruction near the *Pimple*. From the Italian side, the Piana grouping, exceeded the clutter of a large mass of motor vehicles on the road and in its adjacency, taken position with it more or to the height of the knoll. Batteries joined to other

Schizzo n. 27

BEDA FOMM
SITUAZIONE DEL RAGGRUPPAMENTO BERGONZOLI
IL POMERIGGIO DEL 6 FEBBRAIO



of the Babini brigade and guns they began to fire at pointblank. The M Tank Battalion departed to the attack to the west of the via Balbia. On the forefront of such threat, after a series of violent actions, the 2nd *Royal Tank Regiment* withdrew to the shelter of a smoke-screen behind Sidi Ahmed, also to re-supply ammunition.

The shadows of the evening were falling and in the ranks of the Eastern Libya Rearguard the dejection was replaced. It appeared clearly that the situation of the rests of the 10th Army - spaced out on a depth nearly a group of forty of kilometers, in a chaotic a sequence of bottled means, destroyed materials, military groups and civilians, confused Commanders - was deprived of hope. Bergonzoli, considering the occurrence of the encirclement of his minimal units and considering the possibilities of a successful of an action of force is for the tactics of the enemy who succeeded to immobilize without to allow to couple, is for the hour by now advanced, it was resolved to try various routes of escape and by hand sent to the commanders of the three still organized groups the following message:

"n. 88. 6 February 1941, 17:00 hours. The battles today have convinced to me that the enemy has cut the direct communications with Agedabia by the costal route. Every attempt to reach that objective for such route would remain unfruitful, as it has demonstrated the combat of the afternoon. I have decided to reach Agedabia by the seaward track. The Piana Grouping its artilleries all on the current line positions and will help, with lively action against enemy mechanized means and the armored car, the action of the Armored Brigade that marked the head, beginning the movement at 18:00 hours. Your Lordships, acquitted the task, I will try to reach for the same road. General Bergonzoli ".

The forces were articulated in two block. To right, on the next track to the sea, the III and V Tank Battalions, one 65/17 battery, one 47/32 company guns and two 20 millimeter sections; on the left, on the roadway, the 12th field artillery. The concept of employment of the troops is not very clear, but it seems that the right block, meeting the enemy - and sure the encounter was previewed, the various tanks would not have been introduced in this director - had to open the road by force. The blockade of left had instead to try of infiltrate between the wide meshes of the English deployment and procedure towards Agedabia: in other words, he had to trust to fortune. While Col. Piana remained deployed on the *Pimple* in order to at least support the beginning of the attempt, the two blocks left. The

the march of that one of right was extremely slow for the bad track, blocks of the services scattered along the distance, the rain and the dark. Towards midnight, after a score of kilometers, found the existence of mined fields, the head elements arrested themselves. They were jointed in front of the positions held from the *Combe force*. The uncertainty of the situation and the land, the uncertain and conflicting result of the close reconnaissance induced Bergonzoli to await the dawn in order to face with greater cognition of the place and things of the enemy (sketch n. 28).

The 12th artillery had the order from Babini "to maintain connection" with the tanks, but its commander, Col. Grande, thought it opportunely very preferable "to place side by side" the action of the armor. Taken therefore the direct control of the 20 mm. battery and with nine machine-guns in line carried out a wide conversion, heading against the English light tanks, supported from the group from the 10th Regiment that in the meantime was deployed and had opened the fire. The movement was much deciding that the adversary withdrew itself towards the northeast. In the first dusk of the evening Col. Grande reached the coast, occupying with the machine-gunner, to whose extremity oriental placed one 100 mm. battery, front to the northeast. Then he sent an officer to Generals Bergonzoli and Babini in order to try to communicate with them that the road was free and called to the 75 mm. group, until then engaged against the attacks from the east. Nightfall and the dark had made still more bottom for rage of a thunderstorm with hail. The sent officer did not reach Bergonzoli nor the Babini brigade, by now thriving along the coastal track with the 75 mm. group, He was not believed by the officer that he met, in spite of assured them is passable with a heavy truck and he invited them to listen to him. Col. Grande then decided to continue on Agedabia with the single 100 mm. group and the 20 mm. battery:

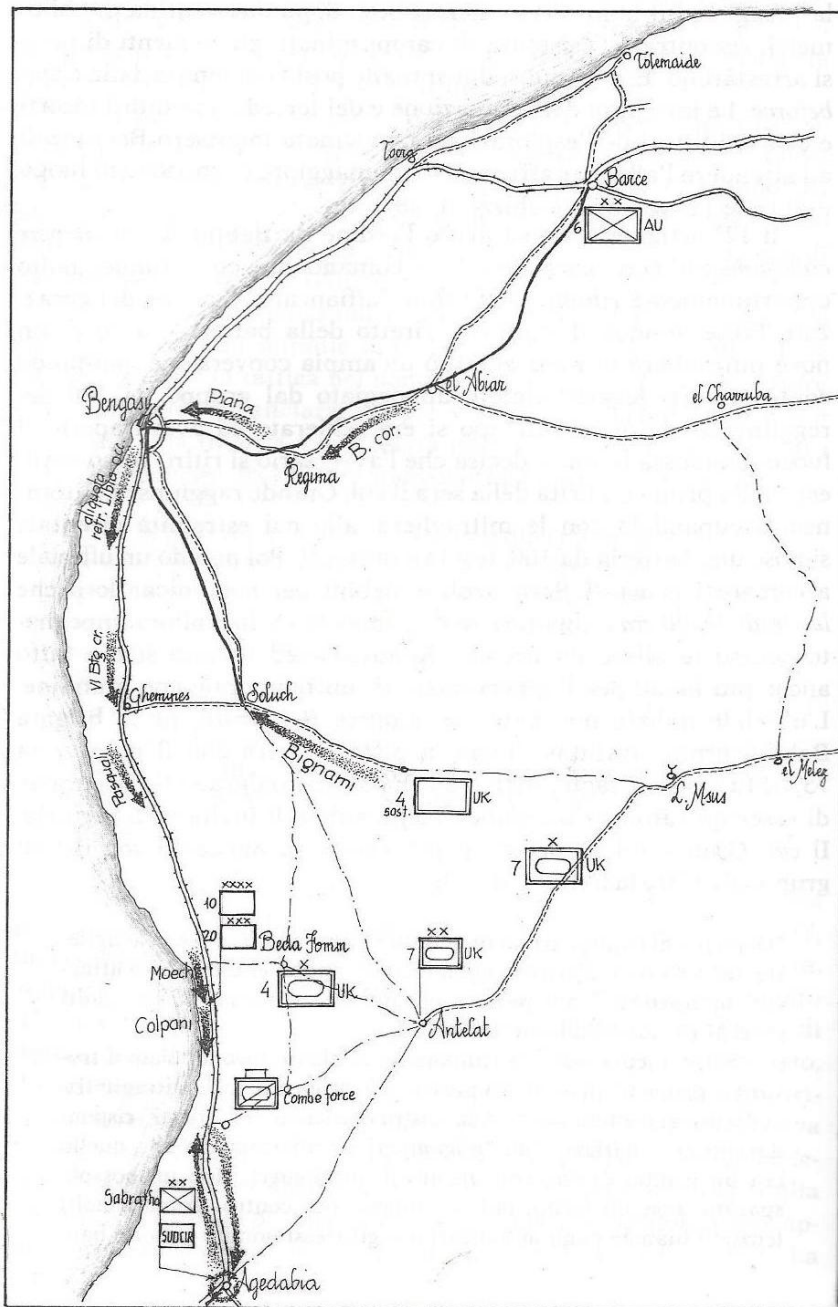
“After a few kilometers I reached the first motor vehicles and the artilleries of XX Army Corps abandoned; guns still were attached to the tractors. Among the guns and the motor vehicles were also many M 13 tanks armored car etc., intact.

In fact for some kilometer more, we begun to find the first troops that in possession of their own arms and machine-guns they slept and they smoked. To our question: "*What are you*" they answered systematically "*prisoners*" and they asserted they were a concentration camp of prisoners. Not a shot fired, not a wounded, not a dead man; for against, large, many white sheets on the motor vehicles and the same men and many white flags

The battle of Beda Fomm. The situation at 22:00 of 6 February

Schizzo n. 28

BEDA FOMM
LA SITUAZIONE ALLE ORE 22 DEL 6 FEBBRAIO



were hoisted everywhere.

Very difficult and painful in the sense moral and material was for the first group make their way through the clutter of abandoned materials and liabilities of self-styled prisoners (...). Since I could not waste time and since wade through the clutter of abandoned materials was increasingly difficult, I continued with my own and I moved.

The so-called field of prisoners, in which I have not met an Englishman, was crossed from small tar drums put to obstruction the road, by one armored car and some machine-gun posts in the earth. A lot English were sure that we would not have tried disordered to pass that *against* my column has been opened the fire, and nearly *all* high, when I had removed the tar drums and already was passed with first means. The fire of my 9 machine-gunners that fired violently has made an impression and reduced to silence the few men who watched the obstruction. I have 2 died and the 10 wounded, the half of which among the personal strange to the regiment, which had joined my column.

After a ten of kilometers I have found a new obstruction consisting of two single Phrygian* horses watched from an armored car. Also here, in spite of the noise of my motor vehicles, English are themselves aware of us when already I personally had removed the Phrygian horses and were passed with the first 20 mm. gun. My machine-gunner has hit in full load the armored car; the English fire was so messy and in that late second episode I have not had some loss.

They arrive towards midnight at Agedabia and I have found desert. I stopped for approximately an hour with the hope of being reached by the columns of Gen. Bergonzoli and Babini (...) "⁽⁴⁸⁾.

As far as the Piana grouping, to acquitted task, a few guns and trucks had headed towards the sea to join to the Armored Brigade, but, arriving at the dune ground, some means were stopped in the sand, others got lost in the dusk and finally fell into enemy hands.

The much more to the north the 6th Australian Division was advancing frantically through the *gebel* in spite of the insistent rain of those days had changed the road and the ground into a sea of reddish mud and in spite of the interruptions activated from the engineers of the 10th Army. El-Abiar was occupied without opposition. At dusk the Australian recon in *Bren carriers* entered Benghazi. Gen. Robertson, informed the Mayor that he meant to make his own formal entrance into the city the following morning, and started at once towards

*No idea what this is. I'm guessing some kind of wooded structure. A saw horse by another name.

Ghemines the 2/11th Battalion and with one squadron of the 6th Cavalry, a platoon armored cars and a Field battery.

7 February.

The first lights of 7 February found Bergonzoli in the uncertainty because the reconnaissance had confirmed the presence of a minefield. Then discarded the idea to continue for Zuetina, he steady at head for south-east, directly against the obstruction of the Combe group. He still had the command unit (an armored car, one shabby motorcycle platoon and two 20 mm. sections), of seven light tanks strangely survivors to the easy mass slaughter of the LX Battalion and of some thirty of medium trucks. The Combe group was well arranged and when, towards 08:00, he saw the Italian armor to enter action opening at once a concentrated fire. But the attack was animated from the anger of the desperation. Without to attend to the losses the big wave of M 13 threw on the battalion of the *Rifle Brigade* and on the first alignment of antitank guns. All fired: riflemen, machine-gunners, tank crewmen, artillerymen, in a whirlwind of smoke and sand. For the English it was important to resist in place, for the Italians to go ahead until smashed. Gradually, beating again blow on blow, losing tank after tank, the M 13 approach the enemy positions, exceeded the trenches, overthrowing the guns. Only five wagons succeeded to exceed the barrier. They headed towards stretches of the catering official, symbolic objective. An English antitank gun, put in emplacement for serving haphazard gatherings but served from an optimal and fortunate gunlayer, liquidated them all in a few minutes: one was hit in the turret, three to their crawler tracks and the last one was arrested to some meter from stretches by the death of its driver.

The defense was put to hard test - Gen O'Connor commented. - The Italian tanks penetrated until the headquarters of the *Rifle Brigade* before being rejected with serious losses, they inflicted, above all, from the antitank batteries. It was truly the end" ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

On the battlefield, there was silence. Bergonzoli resigned to order the cessation of the fire, but after the failure of the Armored Brigade the yield was spontaneous. While from the British positions with of Italian means, than since the day before extending on the roadway and in its adjacency immovable and in some ways even threatening, he was seen with uncertain mixture of concern and consciousness of victory, appeared here and there some

white handkerchiefs. At 09:00 O'Connor arrived at the headquarters of the 7th Armored Division and learned that the battle was ended. "*Fox killed in the open*" transmitted in the clear to Wavell.

When the head of the 19th Australian Brigade reached el Magrum, halfway between Ghemines and the *Pimple*, at the beginning of the longest battlefield that spread out for more than thirty kilometers across of the **via Balbia**, the picture that was presented to the Australians could not but provoke in them a sense of admired satisfaction: abandoned, turned upside down and set afire trucks; twisted or intact pieces of artillery, with broken or burnt wheels and the caissons; knocked out tanks, blackened from the fire; personal arms, cases of ammunitions and provisions, dispersed drums of gas everywhere, the sight of loss. And, more far away, dark desolation of the beaten, that in groups were dragged in by the victors of the 7th Armored Division.

The battle of Beda Fomm destroyed those that remained of the Italian 10th Army. They succeeded to reach Tripolitania only 8,300 men: 7,000 national and 1,300 Libyans ⁽⁵⁰⁾. The enemy announced the capture of beyond 20,000 prisoners, 100 M 13 tanks (including those destroyed), more or less than 200 usable pieces of artillery and 1,500 motor vehicles, after repairs ⁽⁵¹⁾. The English losses amounted to 3,000 men approximately, but more of 80% of the wheel means and armor were destroyed or not further employable and of only remaining the armored car of the *King's Dragoon Guards*, the reinforcements arriving at Mechili, could be considered in good conditions of efficiency.

3. THE FINAL PHASE OF THE CAMPAIGN

The conclusion of the battle of Beda Fomm opened the last phase of the 1940-41 campaign. From the British side it was dealing with continuing or stopping the offensive; from the Italian side to complete the defensive order of Tripolitania. Both issues were tied with double wire with other fundamental problems: the aid to give to Greece on one side and the inflow of armored reinforcements from Italy for the other.

Every attack progressing gets exhausted, Clausewitz asserted, and effectively XIII Corps was almost to the extreme of its forces. But it had the moral to stars. As soon as the noise of the battle of Beda Fomm had been extinguished that a squadron of the 11th Hussars was at once started towards Agedabia. Here were collected - in their words- other prisoners, arrived a second squadron,

of Hussars continued on to el-Agheila, at the border between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The evening of the 7th the Commander of the regiment was found at el-Agheila, with patrols pushed 70-80 kilometers towards the West. But the contact with the Italians had not been made.

O' Connor did not have doubts: by now in Tripolitania there had to remain a division, incomplete besides, therefore it was necessary to insist and to proceed to the conquest of all of Libya. Reinforcements could be disembarked from Italy, is true, however it was worth the pain to run the risk. Aware of the existence of the Greek issue, he examined with Dorman-Smith all the elements of the situation. Tobruk was by now in full operation and, if the German bombers had been conveniently opposed, soon they could be in Benghazi also, that it not only meant availability of supplies for the units currently in field, but also for the 2nd Armored Division, which it had been ordered to move to Mechili, and for another Australian Brigade. Among the suggested organizational provisions from the new state of fact, there was also the administration of the occupied territory. Wavell had decided to entrust it to Gen. Wilson, who already he had installed himself at Barce, as governor of Cyrenaica. On 9 February Dorman-Smith was sent, therefore, by Wilson. It did was not very hard work to persuade him of the possibility and the usefulness to continue in the effort, but it was necessary the approval of Wavell and since at Barce the communications worked badly, Dorman-Smith were rushed to Tobruk from where he sent a urgent dispatch, then he continued towards Cairo in order to personally support the proposal. The morning of the 12th he entered in the office of Wavell. All the maps of Libya, which previously hung on the wall, had been removed and to their place there was only: that one of Greece. "*You see, Eric - Wavell exclaimed - I am planning my spring campaign!*"

For the English Commanders in Chief the knots to unravel were several. First of all the freedom of movement in the central Mediterranean. From November the Royal Navy had been domineering, but the arrival of the X *Fliegerkorps* in Sicily and the first raids on Malta (that of 10 January had caused serious damage to the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*) and in North Africa they showed at once that to move ships within the range of the *Stuka*, in daylight hours, had become much to dangerous. Some of them derived the necessity to increase the number of aircraft and of submarines based at Malta and to avoid the possibility that the islands of the Dodecanese could be used by the Germans as bridge in order to carry attacks on the channel and in the Middle East. Adm. Cunningham supported the occupation of the island of Caso and

then of Castelrosso, that would have replaced (*operation Workshop*) that one on Pantelleria. Caso would have made the bombing of the airport of Scarpanto possible and the occupation of Scarpanto would have facilitated the successive invasion to Rhodes (*operation Mandibles*). The Chiefs of the General Staff in London stopped the order to authorize the plan, inasmuch as at the end of January the Germans had dropped aerial mines in the Canal, using Rhodes for refueling.

Now the protection of the Canal he came to acquire a greater weight is for the British, Indian units and Egyptian deployed in correspondence with the water way, it is for the provisions of logistic character, is for the measures of air defense. From June 1940 the expansion of the docks and the improvement of the railway and street communications had doubled the ability to the port of Suez and, at the same time, there had been constructed wharves in several localities of the Canal, where the ships could unload and the material to continue by railroad or highway transportation. Now it became urgent to increase the ability to unload at Suez or to south of the city, to double the railroad between Suez and Ismailia, to develop Aqaba as a port of to unload by barge average motor vehicles, to construct an oil pipe-line from Suez Porto Said. But all this involved the arrival of huge materials and the availability of time.

A lot in order to balance in some way, at least for the moment, the closing of the Mediterranean to the British marine traffic, Adm. Somerville, commander of Force H, proposed a raid on Genoa. It looked like there was a battleship of the *Littorio* class, but in any case the effect of an operation of the sort would have been remarkable. After a first attempt, abandoned essentially for adverse meteorological conditions, Force H sailed from Gibraltar on 6 February subdivided into two groups. In the first hours of the 8th it was concentrated off the coast of Majorca and at 08:00 he opened the fire on Genoa. 11 February the formation re-entered undisturbed to Gibraltar. Tell the truth there would have been the possibility of interception. 8 February Adm. Jachino, that had replaced the Adm. Campioni as commander in chief of the fleet, received order to leave from Spezia with three battleships and seven destroyers, who was joined by three cruisers and had to add three destroyers from Naples. He had the task of being in the Area of the strait of Bonifacio for being in conditions for taking part is towards north is towards south. But for that of a series of misfortunes prevented any movement until when it was too much late. The first among all causes the deficient service of aerial reconnaissance

at sea and the bad connection between the Supermarina and Superaereo.

Then there was the very complex issue of Greece. On 8 February he confirmed his decision to resist to a German attack and requests to examine the capacity of the British participation in such eventually. That day, therefore, the Committee of defense meeting in London in order to settle the military politics to follow in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. The first point, that demanded immediate decision, concerned the prosecution of the offensive on Tripoli. In favor of the occupation of the Tripolitania - probably not difficult - there were some considerations: elimination of the Italians from the North Africa and practical enemy impossibility to newly invade Egypt, constitution of an optimal air force bases at Tripoli against Sicily, making contact with the French. Other aspects played to unfavorable: absorption of resources, for the defense of the new conquest and difficulty for the safety of the long maritime line of communications. These two negatives sides influenced on the discussed for participation in the Balkans. Holding account of that Churchill who wrote to Wavell that, also appreciating the conquest of Benghazi, carried out just three weeks before foreseen, the previous instructions were always valid:

"(...) your maximum effort must now consist in helping Greece and/or Turkey. That excludes any serious effort, against Tripolitania, even if set in secondary action that direction would constitute a useful feint. You would have therefore to consolidate your position at Benghazi and to concentrate all the forces available in the Delta, in preparation of the movement towards Europe" ⁽⁵²⁾.

In order to create the diplomatic premises and to realize the military measures Eden and Gen. Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, would have arrived the 14th or the 15th and, after a re-examination of the entire situation at Cairo, would have had talks in Athens and Ankara with their Greek and Turkish counterparts. Eden had received wide but precise directives. Some points particularly interested Churchill: what was the minimal entity of the forces to leave in Cyrenaica? which provisions was it necessary to adopt in order to render Benghazi a mighty sea and air base? which the administration to introduce in Libya in order to separate the Italian population from Mussolini? it was possible to constitute in the region of the Delta a powerful well articulated Expeditionary Corps and? And still: *operation Mandibles* was to be executed as soon as

as soon as possible but on condition that he did not interfere in the attainment of the main objective, the aid to Greece; all the land and aerial forces of the Middle East had to be winnowed with attention in relationship to the missions to which they were assigned "*in order to make that the many efficient military units are outlined in the current draft and made to feel all the their weight immediately*". In brief, Eden had the task and the authority however to examine all the connected aspects with the problem of the eastern Mediterranean and to propose better solutions in order to overcome every single difficulty. Also having supported the shipment of the 50th Division with first the convoy departing from United Kingdom, the relationship between unit employment and fed force were a fixed nail for Churchill:

"(...) my impression circa the Middle East - he wrote to Eden, just as he reached Cairo is what reigns is the enormous confusion between the total force present and many semi efficient tactical formations. It seems probable that as well as the British 6th Division as well as the Australian 7th Division will remain inefficient for some time. Perceive what we can send for the framework of the true combatant units. Some improvisation in place with transfers other semi efficient units it would have to be possible. Organic sacrosanct if they have not practical success on bases of various possible results The final message sets regarding present shows force more than 50,000 men in the Middle East between 31 Decembers and 31 January. It does not jump out anything from these reinforcements under form of fighting units? If fighting formations are therefore little regarding the force present and if for in addition the transfer of these small formations to another front is therefore slow and it cannot be made nothing in order to improve the situation, then we must recognize that our operating possibilities on the continent are limited and that entire slowly for the Middle East it must be relegated as secondary" ⁽⁵³⁾.

The shipment of the cited 50th Division would have involved the cancellation of the programmed departure of 15,000 men for support of varied level, services, etc; possible what, according to the *War Office*, because the use of the port of Benghazi would have rendered available various units. It is not that Wavell hurried to reply that the 15,000 men of reinstate of as much as it was very necessary were not more so than the 50th Division: in the first place Benghazi, subject to attacks of German aircraft, did not turn out employable as a logistics base and, consequently, there remained the necessity of the long line of communications through Cyrenaica; in the second place, the units, especially those of the artillery, engineers and transmissions, had to be

brought back to the wartime staffing levels; finally, the logistic apparatus had absolutely to be held to a high efficiency if it wanted the employment of that major unit in conditions for fighting well. In the end, the convoy left without the 50th Division.

The exchanges of preliminary views between Eden and Sir John Dill and the three Commanders in Chief of the Middle East were rapid. Wavell proposed at the least leave in Cyrenaica, one of the trained Australian Divisions, one Indian Brigade in course of training and one Armored Brigade. The English 6th Division, in course of constitution with the 16th Infantry Brigade, the various garrison of Marsa Matruth and units, had to be employed for *operation Mandibles*. The 4th and the 5th Indian Division were engaged in Eritrea and therefore they did not appear useable, instead from Kenya could perhaps be made to flow to Egypt the South African Division as soon as found the ships being necessary. All added it turned out usable for Greece: a first group with a Armored Brigade, the New Zealand Division (of which but one Brigade was still not disembarked in Egypt), two regiments of medium-caliber gun artillery and antiaircraft units; as second group with one Polish Brigade and one Australian Division; a third group with another Armored Brigade and a second Australian Division. The first contingent could be sent within thirty days from the decision, the others at intervals of three weeks. In total it was be a matter of 100,000 men, 32 heavy field pieces. 240 field, 200 antitank, 192 antiaircraft and 142 tanks. ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Longmore, instead, was perplexed. In Greece already three fighter groups and four bomber groups operated. They were moreover to reckon another bombing group for the end of February and another two for the end of March; moreover the employment of three groups of *Wellington* for the nighttime bombing from bases in Egypt. Perhaps in March it could have constituted two fighter groups of *Tomahawk*, of American production, but if the equipment arrived. This was all and, naturally, for Turkey there remained nothing. Also Cunningham represented difficulty. The critical aspects were two: the magnetic and acoustic mines that could are launch from Axis aircraft before the Greek ports and on the routes to access them and the entity of the shipping necessary in order to transport the Expeditionary Corps. For the first requirement he considered indispensable the arrival of minesweeper suitable to the employment against any type of mines. For the second, the first calculation had

indicated requirements of about fifty of ships that could be scraped together only by withholding those of the convoys that reached in Middle East, with all the consequences of the case.

The talks at Athens, then to Ankara and then back to Athens, were the much laborious and the final agreement - made after the entrance of the Germans into Bulgaria - extremely laborious⁽⁵⁵⁾. In any case it was reached and Wavell was about to concentrate all his attention on the new theater of operations, sure that from the position of el-Agheila - door of entrance to Cyrenaica - any enemy action of disturbance could easily be controlled. More than that there was no fear, for at least some time: the 10th Army had been destroyed and from Tripoli to el-Agheila 760 kilometers ran, for good part of it desert.

All the British generals were not of agreement on the goodness of the decision. Also comprising motivations of political nature, some saw with extreme sorrow to vanish a golden occasion. Most hurt was probably O'Connor. In the report compiled in imprisonment he mourned that a resolute campaign against Tripoli never had been made in consideration. He touched also the tactical aspects that from the first moment appeared unfavorable for the prosecution of the offensive: the fatigue of the troops, the strain of the material and the excessive length of the arm of supply. But to his warning "*the troops did not wish other than to go ahead. The first the question that they always placed in this period was: "what? not going forward?"*", therefore it could not be spoken about usury of the men. As far as the others two factors, thought them over come able with a plan based on the speed of the execution and on the sea and air opposition to the in flow of Italian-Germans reinforces to Tripoli. The 11th Hussars, with a squadron of light tanks and one of the *King's Dragoon Guards*, continuation after twenty-four hours from the support group and all the artillery available, re-supplied with all the fuel of the division and supported by the *Royal Air Force*, could very well move on 8 February and reach Sirte quickly, while the *Royal Air Force* and *Mediterranean Fleet* would have been raged against whichever convoy tried of approach Tripoli. Meanwhile it would set up a second echelon forces with armored forces with the tanks remaining to the 7th Armored Division plus the 3rd and the 5th *Royal Tanks*. Such forces would have had to move for Sirte towards the 20th. Once re-united, all the forces would decidedly have aimed against Tripoli, in concomitance to an invasion possibly carried out at Tripoli from one Infantry Brigade. For the logistic part,

the *Mediterranean Fleet* was to quickly prepare a good naval base at Benghazi, where convoys coming from Alexandria would have disembarked the supplies. "*It seems - O'Connor commented - that such operation would have not only been possible, but succeeding would have had every probability of, since all the three Armed Forces had given their maximum support and they had not been dissuaded from other tasks*". And, also concluding that "*it is up to history to demonstrate if the operation would have been realizable. The science of them is easy, but we all were made bitter that the enterprise had not been tried*", of the validity of our own thesis we remain deeply persuaded.

On 6 February the S.I.M. sent to the chief of the General Staff a note on the situation. According to news collections in Cairo, Wavell was intention to continue the offensive until to the elimination of every Italian presence in Libya. The probable reasons of this decision were from seek in the same conviction that Germany in order to take part in massive way in the theater of operations of the Mediterranean and that therefore was opportune forgone, in the convenience and possibility to constitute a compact front with the French forces of North Africa, in the conviction that the troops engaged in East Africa were sufficient to resolve the game alone. The appraisal of the English availabilities in Cyrenaica derived from that generally completed to mid January (see following page) and was, as usual, wide exaggerated: three Armored Divisions, nine Divisions of infantry and one French brigade. In Egypt there turned out moreover six Divisions of infantry of the *Commonwealth* and seemed in arrival another three Divisions. That placed, the effort on Tripoli could be carried out with a force of two Armored Divisions, one motorized and two or three of infantry, more or less widely motorized ⁽⁵⁶⁾. As already it has been observed, the appreciation of the opposing situation was not absolutely adherent to the truth. From Italian side was considered present in Egypt-Cyrenaica 350,000 men and 1,100 tanks, supported from 700-750 aircraft, more than a hundred aircraft of the *Mediterranean Fleet*. In effects at that time the Commander of the Middle East had under his command 340,000 men, including reinforcements en route, but of these: 70,000 were found in Kenya and at Aden, approximately 30,000 in Eritrea and 40,000 in Palestine. Therefore in Egypt-Cyrenaica there remained 200,000 men, of which, according to calculations of Churchill, a third employed in the rear for services and bases. The 120-130,000 "combatants" gave life

Situation of British major unit at the end of January 1941

According to the SIM	In reality(*)
<p>1. <i>In Cyrenaica:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - zona of Tobruk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two Australian Inf. Div. one English Armored Div. one French Mot. Brigade - Siwa-Giarabub: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one Australian Inf. Div. - Bardia-Sollum-Sidi Omar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> four Inf. Div. one English Armored Div. - arriving from the Delta: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one English Armored Div. <p>2. <i>In Egypt:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marsa Matruh: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one-two Inf. Div.. - the region of the Delta: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> three-four Inf. Div. 	6th Australian Inf. Div.
	7th English Armored Div.
	16th English Inf. Bd.
	2nd English Armored Div.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on the Canal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> three Inf. Div.. - for the internal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two Inf. Div. <p>3. <i>In Palestine & Trans-Jordan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one Australian Inf. Div. one English Cav. Div. troops equal to one Inf. Div. 	troops equal to one Inf. Bd.
	2nd New Zealand Inf. Div.
	Polish Inf. Bd.
	troops equal to one Inf. Bd.
	7th & 9th Australian
	1st English Cav. Div.

(*) Drawn from H.F. Joslen. *Order of Battle* cit.

hardly two English Armored Divisions, one Division of English infantry and one Polish. Rather just as major units. From this the error of the S.I.M., not justified however circa the troops employed in the offensive, and the constant disappointment of Churchill: "*I deplore deeply the resulting composition of the Army of the Middle East*" ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The Italian possibilities in place were insufficient: the rest of the 10th Army and the 5th Army. First they numbered 20-25,000 men, if all had been saved; the second one already as of the first of September 1940 was impoverished and in the five last months it had become a shadow of itself ⁽⁵⁸⁾; totally unproved with artillery of accompaniment, antitank and antiaircraft and heavy field; reduced, in field artilleries, to two 75/27 groups per division and with one division without not even those; unproved with tanks; nearly totally lacking in means of the transmissions; with the proportion of motor vehicles closely to the requirements of the garrison services. After all, whichever operation was absolutely far from being able to complete one. Gen. Armellini, assigned by the Comando Supremo, had at once proposed to consider a restoration of the efficiency of the army and an eventual shipment of entire divisions from Italy for the case a situation of emergency took place in Tunisia and Badoglio had concurred, also without much engagement, annotating the note with "*the situation of the 5th Army was noted as having considered 'the depots for the complements' for the 10th Army. To study the completion of the units*". A few days later but, impressed included to the note, telegraphing to Graziani: "*For each event I mean to very soon replace the 5th Army in efficiency. Given Gariboldi's assignment to telegraph as much as it was necessary to him*". ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

The General Staff of the Army started therefore the program, but the basis of the work was unavoidably unmined by the continuous withdraws of materials and means that the N.A. Supreme Intendancy continued to carry out to favor of the 10th Army and from the fact that Graziani, in whose name the Intendancy acted, was also the Chief of the General Staff of the Army. Then Badoglio took part prohibiting the ulterior impoverishment of the 5th Army, prescribing that the necessity for the Army of Berti they had to be satisfied with consignments sent from the motherland and asking to see the program of reconstitution to approve them or not. The first examination (24 September) had carried to realize the requirements of 10,000 men (of which 360 officers), 1,000 motor vehicles, 92 tanks, 210 pieces of artillery, etc... All that could be sent from Italy arriving in three months, subtracting elements

elements given to you for joining of existing major unit. The procedure would undoubtedly have provoked weakening in some fields but not obliged to dissolve some division. There was but one dramatic point: the motor vehicles. In Italy there did not exist enough, therefore he urged to make absolute assignment on the restoration of those unserviceable ones of the Tripolitania, approximately 900.

Situation motor vehicles on 17/9/1940

	trucks		
Location	light	heavy	Trailers
in ITALY	10,500	9,200	2,850
in ALBANIA	1,600	1,400	150
in AEGEAN	120	100	-
in LIBYA	3,350	3,700	900
Totals	15,570	14,400	3,900

30% of the trucks and 70% of the trailers were requisitioned. Nearly all prescribed ones.

To tell the truth Graziani had always been some worry circa Tunisia. He made to compile from the Commander of the 5th Army a study of defensive character and, in that circumstance, Gariboldi manifested the opinion that in the hypothesis of some vague French offensive, and holding account of the conditions of force of the Tripolitania and the consistency of the permanent organization to the western frontier, the defensive task could much more better be acquitted proceeding to immediate the fast occupation of the threshold of Gabes, 22 kilometers length, rather than to defend along the border. Such solution could be realized by surprise with the two divisions of the XX Army Corps (to the person in charge of the operation) trucked and one third to make the trip with according to travel of the same motor vehicles, with another division in reserve. The requirements were translate into 2,000 trucks approximately. Naturally the thing remained in the state of a proposal.

About the first of December restoration was still in deep water. Many units already had been prepared in Italy, its true, but the marine transports found series difficulty and of the other part the reinforcements for Cyrenaica soon became an issue of the first priority. On 12 February the 5th Army comprised: the frontier guard and the cover for the Tunisian border with 15,000 men and 300 guns, of which 55 were antitank; the X Corps and the fortress of Tripoli with 50,000 men, 280 guns of which 50 were antitank, and 92 light tanks (IV and V Battalions); the *Ariete* Armored Division, just disembarked with 6,000 men, 60 guns of which 36 were antitank and 117 light tanks. Altogether Gariboldi had 80,000 men, 160 guns of 47/32, 160 field pieces and 209 light tanks.

Based on the appraisal of the S.I.M., the troops available in Libya and the events in course, Mussolini sent to Graziani his own orders. The defense of the fortress of Tripoli and the Tunisian frontier could be entrusted to a few units, essentially of the frontier guard; the battle for Tripolitania had to be given on positions as much as possible to the east, in order to protect the air force bases more effectively, in order to force the enemy to fight with the desert to his rear. In particular:

"The Italian and German mechanized units will have to be employed - that it is possible for entire divisions and always offensively - at first in the delaying defense of Sirte, profiting on every favorable occasion in order to pass to the offensive to at the bottom so as to inflict on the English as many losses as possible; in due time which maneuverable reserves from the position of Your choice, in order to act on the flank and the rear of the enemy. ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

Just as soon as the letter left with these directives from Tripoli a disastrous dispatch arrived:

"Report on the final events to the eastern front. As I already had communicated the threat of encircling of all our positions of the *Gebel* determined the order to me for the evacuation of Derna the day of 29 January & totalitarian withdraw the first day of February. I carried out the evacuation without that the enemy could resume the contact in the mountain because of the powerful street interruptions. Our troops had totally completed the outflow from according the pass of the *Gebel* on the first day that of the fourth and they were gotten ready to at continue for the south Benghazi indeed they had already begun it in the day of the 5th for protection of ours positions

of el Abiar, Regima, Sceleidima, Antelat, Agedabia, Agheila. The disability of the enemy at to chase from the north on hasty thrown tracks of the south from Mekili to el-Abiar & for Zavia-Msus on Antelat succeeding to flow to Sidi Hhamed el-Magrum and Agedabia with the first medium armor at 16:00 hours approximately cutting our movement of outflow. From that moment fine at all day yesterday the sixth carried out a losing battle in the plain south of Benghazi between Soluk & Ghemines. Other armored forces moving from el-Abiar have in the evening of the sixth occupied Benghazi that had orders to surrender without a fight in order not to provoke useless destruction of the civil population.

With this last action at two months from Sidi Barrani, during which with the army was nearly destroyed & with twenty thousand men approximately it had endured the enemy pressure blasting a position on the *Gebel* with the hope of might in time consolidate firmly with the in flows from the Mother country because for if same weak & livid in the air, Cyrenaica is overrun. The elements that constituted the last defense of the coast to Agedabia & el-Agheila are in outflow on Sirte where part of the troops were moved some days before. From the interceptions it can be still hoped that it leave to our medium armor are resolutions to break the enemy circle & to channel towards Agedabia. The troops in outflow are being collected around Homs. I will not specify the entity. While the enemy chases along the coast & the sea at Zuetina where part of ours was directed. The problem of Tripolitania is shown imminent on which I report with relationship by hand that I will send. Graziani" ⁽⁶¹⁾

Not that the Comando Supremo made excessive illusions on the outcome of the fight, but this end was much too bitter a struggle. At Tripoli, however, more than words they were made necessary and the disembarkation of the three light Tank Battalions of the *Ariete* had tightened the heart. Graziani therefore, resentful, answered the Comando Supremo who the directives dispatched to him regarded a future situation and that while he had to position with what was remaining. Therefore he had decided to constitute a "Sirte" field with the function of first arrest and a strong camp at Homs, on the line of the Margheb, to obstruct of the coast and the road for Gussabat, with the troops recovered from Cyrenaica. To the *Ariete* division, only major unit of maneuver available and arriving with insufficient war weight, the task was entrusted to maneuver on the flank and the rear of the enemy. The Divisions were deployed in the entrenched field of Tripoli could remain there: they were badly reduced and therefore lacking in means of transport that

they would have been forced, where had agreed to employ them more to the east, to long movements on foot.

Naturally the choice of the Margheb line was dictated by taken a careful examination of the terrain: there did not exist tactical holds of a sort between Sirte and Homs and the enemy could therefore easy have repeated the well known maneuver of infiltrations and encircling. In short Graziani thought that if English still arrived at Agedabia in forces, itself being in a position to head at once to Sirte, the employment of the three weakest divisions of infantry was equivalent to a useless sacrifice; if instead forces arrived at Agedabia and they were tired out to a time of rest to rearrange themselves, the indicated deployment appeared largely sufficient. Of the other part it was obvious that the arrival of the German armored troops would have lead to new operating possibilities. *"In order to holdback the enemy a while it is not in this meantime other means that the air force, which today here is to the contrary at the maximum of the ineffectiveness"* asserted Graziani ⁽⁶²⁾.

In Rome these dispositions were little liked. A field of Sirte with functions of arrest and an obstruction of the via Balbia at the height of Homs, and that is at a hundred of kilometers from Tripoli, with the troops which escaped from Beda Fomm and the *Ariete*, as mobile reserve, were something very different from a lead delaying maneuver from the Armored Division in Sirtica and also to east of Sirte. And the three divisions remaining at Tripoli did not allow a defense with 200-300 kilometers more to the east, that as such to obligate the English to fight with the desert to their rear. Moreover the signal made on the difficulties of road haulage of the infantries seemed excessive pessimist. However, the immediate task of the 5th Army was that to allow the disembarkation of reinforcements. Some of them derived the usefulness to search such gain of time also in the Sirtica, as to sacrifice some unit, and the uselessness of reducing the entrenched field of Tripoli. Therefore, on 11 February Mussolini replied to Graziani to comprise the difficulties of the moment well and to have disposed for consistent his aerial reinforcements, but since the possibilities of defense of the Tripolitania were subordinated to the in flow of the foretold reinforcements *"confirm my directives of the 6th current - in short - Delaying actions in Sirtica will have to be possibly carried out also to the east of Sirte. The 5th Army Divisions remained useless round Tripoli. I necessity insist large forces deployments available ahead very possible, at least beyond Misurata"* ⁽⁶³⁾. The same day Guzzoni communicated that the Air Force of Libya would have resumed full efficiency inside

a ten of days with approximately 350 Italian and German aircraft ⁽⁶⁴⁾, but that in order to take part in the Sirtica it was necessary to decide between of the fields of Tauorga, Misurata, Tamet and Bir Dufar. Therefore it had to at least arrest the enemy to east of Sirte until to the end of February.

The air force deployment was hurting. The bitter disappointment is emerging in the course of the description of the events, for as said, by the land Commands in the comparisons of aviation, accused them to have left the troops to the mercy of the *Royal Air Force*. What was a given fact is incontrovertible, but the 5th Air Fleet was truly with the water to its back. After the fall of Bardia it had been forced to clear in a rush many bases in Marmarica, conserving in Cyrenaica two blocks of fields: Maraua, Apollonia and Barce, the more advances, and Benina and Berka, those to the rear. The decision to abandon the Derna-Berta-Mechili line had taxed a new fast evacuation. But this time by now appeared unavoidable the abandonment of the region of Benghazi and, consequently, Gen. Aimone-Cat was essentially preoccupied to save the greater part of the aeronautical organization transporting to Tripolitania the more precious materials, those that could and had allowed the prosecution of the fight. There remained a tactical Command with a bombing group and two of fighters. The fighters were employed for protecting cruises in the zone of Benghazi; SM-79, that could not risk themselves by day without escort, they were reduced to carry out nocturnal mining of the desert tracks and fast recognitions at dawn and sunset. The airports of Benina and Berka were held in efficiency until 4 February. In particular, that one of Benina acted as a bridge for the aircrafts for transport directed to East Africa and for the aircraft of X *Fliegerkorps* in action against the English maritime traffic between Alexandria and Tobruk. That one of Berka was classified to the evacuation of the fugitives.

But also the situation of the airports of the Tripolitania was on the whole not that simple. The necessities of evacuation of the huge material and also of the personnel not more usable for various reasons, let alone the difficulty to quickly prepare the old and new bases, the problems constituted not easy solution for three distinguished causes: concentration on a few bases - of which two (Castel Benito and Mellaha) already previously choked and othesr unsuitable for the provision of the land and organizational deficiencies- of all means and men coming from the successive withdraws; arrival of German units, that although preannounce had unavoidably

aggravated the state of the airports; the lack of aviation fuel .

Many aircraft were recovered: 35 CR. 42 for refit, boarded on two steamboats directed to Italy; some thirty of fighters with motors in precarious conditions and in repairable company, cleared about a sixth or better and transported by flight; another portion was cleared by highway transportation. Having instead to sacrificed numerous SM-79, not transportable by flight for the gravity of the inefficiency nor by taken by road for the unavailability of special means being necessary for that type of aircraft. On a civil field, positioned, near Benina in order to invite enemy attack, they were collectet numerous SM-81, Breda 88 and Ca. 310 out of service or decommissioned. However in spite of the efforts much precious material had to be abandoned and yet others fell into English hands during the battle of Beda Fomm.

After all, the withdraw of the XX Corps from Benghazi was not supported. Graziani had decided that aviation was to protect the outflow on Sirte, but the answer of Gen. Aimone-Cat, that just on 5 February replaced Gen. Porro in command of the 5th Air Fleet, was disappointing: *"Reconnaissance planes will signal enemy presence. However given the origin from sea will not be possible to guarantee the safety to columns in motion."* On 10 February he had three fighter groups (70 aircraft) and 15 SM-79 between Castel Benito and Misurata. The action of the SM-79 was useful for the ineffective and onerous recognition but for scattered counter offense means. The fighters had also convoys escort tasks and defense of locality, for which Aimone-Cat simply perceived as being in a position to watching the Balbia way until to el-Agheila and attacking isolated armored cars.

While the fight infuriated along the coastal strip of the Cyrenaica, the inside was not to remain calm long. Already it has been said that to the beginning of the hostilities the vigilance of the frontier was carried out from two fields: Amseat (approximately 120 kilometers of front), comprising the forts of Capuzzo, Sidi Omar, Sceferzen and Maddalena; and Giarabub (approximately 200 kilometers) with the forts of Uescechet el-Heiro, Garn el-Grein and Giarabub. The personnel were in the great majority composed of Libyans. Most favorable the non-commissioned officers, most favorable the voluntary non-commissioned officers and soldiers, mediocre those recalled that badly were enduring the obligatory conscription and that not always were they totally fit to the service. On all the detached forts that one of the Giarabub, most southern, for the control that were in a position to exercising on the oasis of Siwa, beyond frontier, and for the importance that could be assumed by the enemy as an offensive base against Gialo.

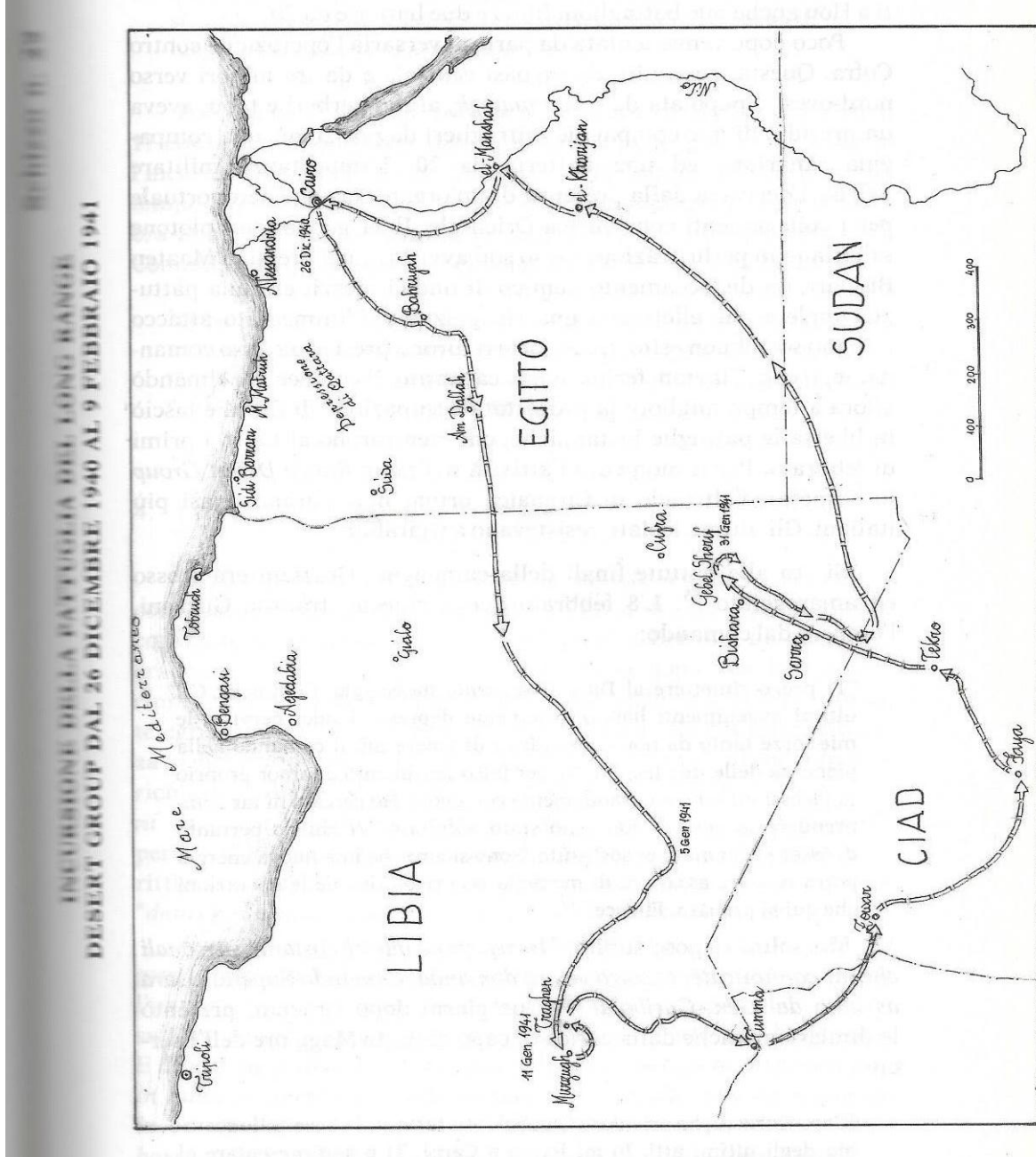
Still more to the south the Libyan Sahara or, in operating terms, the Saharan theater was spread. Obviously simply it was watched with garrisons located in points of obliged passage and connected by tracks with good maintenance. The British offensive, also not being directly involved the garrisons of the oasis of Cufra, in full Sahara, and of Murzuk, in the Fezzan, it had rendered them vulnerable. To the mind of Wavell great designs in purpose had not shown oneself: he had limited forces and, of the rest, he did not think reasonable large guiding actions long therefore eccentric. But something could make, if for nothing other than to increase the annoyances of the Italians. In 1939 he had been formulated a singular proposal from some English who in the previous years, for *hobby*, had acquired deep acquaintance in the field of the travels through the desert; they knew to trace a route in the sand sea, had learned to guide a vehicle through dunes without overturning or silting and knew the way to determine their position using astronomical methods. In other words, they knew how to navigate in the desert. Well, with similar experience it was not the case to give *ad hoc* run to one type of guerrilla with patrols, in the case of a conflict with Italy? Wavell, that he possessed imagination, picked the idea and when it came the moment sent a call to those men and arranged the constitution of a unit of patrols to great distance (*Long Range Patrol Unit*). The dune barrier could moreover be only crossed in a few points and the land would not bear the passage of more than some thirty vehicles. Therefore the forces to employ had to be of modestly equipped entity but of elevated range. From that the adoption of the 30 CWT truck as base element, with fuel for 200 kilometers, provisions and water for three weeks and two or three men of crew. Three patrols, each of three officers and some thirty of men were formed, reaching to the New Zealand units in Egypt (reputedly the most suitable physically and mentally for enterprises of the sort), and use to serious and hard training.

In September 1940 the new unit at first lead activity of patrol until to Gialo, Cufra and Uweinat, contact with the French garrison of Teko was made, constituted here and there depots of fuel and provisions for the future requirements and characterized, with the aid of aircraft, areas adapted for the preparation of emergency landing fields. Then it passed to according to operational cycle. This time with aggressive purposes: the road between Gialo and Agedabia was mined in some points, the fort

of Augila (to the north of Gialo) was attacked, the track for Uweinat was mined. All the added result seemed to justify the provision, also since the probabilities of Italian incursions against land elements located on the African of Takoradi route diminished, and Wavell proposed and obtained that the "unit" became "group" (*Long Range Desert Group*). It became so constituted a new patrol with officers and drawn men from the 2nd *Scots Guards* and the 3rd *Coldstream Guards*.

The next step was taken of with the contact of the Free French of Chad (sketch n. 29). The visit made to Fort Lamy from the patrol of Maj. Bagnold (the inventor and the organizer of the unit) said soon good fruits and Col. Leclerc, when he assumed the military command of Chad, began at once the preparations for the occupation of the oasis of Cufra. While, at the end of December a New Zealand patrol and the patrol of the guards left Cairo with sheik Abd el Gebil Sif en Nasr, practically hostile the Italians, as guide. Exceeding 2,500 kilometers of desert in a week, he joined with a lead French detachment from the Lt.Col. d'Ornano. Murzuk was defended by a machine-gun company and had three Ghibli type aircrafts. On 11 January they attacked. The reaction of the garrison at once became violent, but the assault succeeded to destroy to the aircraft and the hangar, then retired leaving on the field some dead men, among which was Lt. Col. d'Ornano. During the return the small enemy column attacked the places of Traghen and Umm el-Araneb and, on the 13th, el-Gatrun and Tegerbi. It had only success at Traghen, but naturally the operation made to verify fear of new attempts against the oases of Tripolitania. For his part Graziani - that after the fall of Bardia he feared for Tobruk - the fact remained he was hit by English elements from Egypt that had been able themselves lend a hand to the French of Chad. He ordered more reinforcements of the threatened garrisons and requested the 5th Air Fleet of be placed in conditions for guaranteeing the control of all the southern-Cyrenaica territory. That the commander of the *Pegaso* air division, Gen. Matricardi, observed: "*It is necessary however that until when it is put very clear the military commanders do not arrange mobile land units, it is purely a small entity, the insufficient De Gaullist and English enemy forces wandering about to them consent the entire time that to they it will appeal to, bring moral damage of great note, besides the very expectable material damage*". Gariboldi then decided the preparation of two or three quick and stable columns that the elements in withdraw from Gialo and Augila remained at Hon at the disposition of the Commander of

The incursion of the LRDG patrol from 26 December 1940 to 9 February 1941



the theater. Moreover, when possible, had to be transported to Hon also two Libyan battalions and two 20 mm. batteries.

Shortly after he was tempted by enemy the operation against Kufra. This, consisting of an central oasis and three minors to the north-west and populated by 6,000 *Tuareg*, Arab-Berber and *Tebu*, had a garrison of two positional machine-gun companies, a Saharan Africa company and a battery 20. The military importance of the oasis was derived from the presence of an airport organization links with East Africa. On January 31, a platoon patrolling the south Saharan sighted near Maaten Bisciara a detachment of enemy 11/2: was a British patrol who carried out a survey. The immediate fate of Italian attack success, three trucks were taken and the same commander, Capt. Clayton, wounded, was captured. Col. Leclerc then sent back in time the best designed employment Cufra and left in freedom the British patrols, who returned to Cairo in early February. For the moment, the activity of the Long Range Desert Group was suspended: indeed in Cyrenaica now there were almost no more Italian. The last, isolated, they resisted Giarabub.

It was the final battle of the campaign. Graziani was shaken and very bitter⁽⁶⁵⁾. On 8 February had asked, through Guzzoni, to be relived from command:

"I pray to You to give the following message to the Duce. It began: The last events have strongly depressed my nerves & my forces much from my agreement not more holding the command in the fullness of my faculties. If for false feeling of affection just would silence my great feelings of guilty. I have tried to make a compromise with the truth. They have not been heard. I ask to you therefore to recall & replaced me. They are sure that a new energy will be able to render much more than me in the final phase of the operations that is prepared here. It ends"⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Mussolini answered at once: "*In relation to the personal circumstances that you communicate to me, I receive your question. The Comando Superiore will be assumed by Gen. Gariboldi*"⁽⁶⁷⁾. Two days later Graziani he was dismissed also from the burden of the Chief of the General Staff of the Army:

"Caro Guzzoni, I have oriented Gariboldi on all on the basis of the exchange of the final actions. I wait at Carpi. I pray to you to introduce the following to the Duce my question:" Duce! I pray to you, parallel

to the termination of my current functions, to receive my dismissal as Chief of the G.S. of the Army, having absolute need of a long period of rest". Your servant
 „⁽⁶⁸⁾.

Then he left Tripoli by air in order to return to Italy. On the 16th and the 17th he had two talks with Mussolini. These, that he already had conferred the assignment of the Chief of the General Staff of the Army to Roatta, taken time in order to accept the resignation from supreme commander and seem even to have thought to send the Marshal back to Libya ⁽⁶⁹⁾. However it was issue of a few days and on the 24th was defined:

"After further review of developments concerning Libya, I came the determination to accept your resignation from both positions held by you as Governor of Libya and comandante superiore of the Armed Forces of North Africa."

4. THE ITALIAN-GERMAN MILITARY TALKS.

On 20 December, just out from the Vidoni palace where he had been summoned by Guzzoni to request one or two German armored divisions, von Rintelen telegraphed to Berlin. The issue was hotly debated OKW and two days later von Rintelen appealed again to the Comando Supremo stating that it had received a telegram from Keitel, in which he mentioned the gradual in flow of the German troops to Rumania and reference was made the Italian request. With regard to - von Rintelen informed - *"the armored divisions could eventually leave between 10-12 weeks"*, but the OKW had shown some perplexity for the marine transports and above all on the employment of major unit in discussion *"since the current operating situation is of a defensive character"*.

Guzzoni hurried to reassure the intermediary: such transports were made with large convoys well escorted. About the use of or armored divisions there were no doubts that they were well suited for the offensive. And indeed, he added with one polemical point, *"if today we had available, in Libya would be possible to pass to the counter-offensive in the moment in which English, extending by their effort and great distance from the bases, were having a supply crisis"*. Then it wanted to introduce a new element: an Armored Division at Tripoli would have been

profit not only for operations towards Cyrenaica, but also for every eventual danger that had been manifested to the west. Also comprising to deal with of a simple informal speech, such point of view is little satisfactory. If truly something from Tunisia were afraid, and therefore from all French North Africa, it was worth the pain well to study the basis of the problem and to take the necessary precautionary measures. It will be return to the argument, but the signal is meaningful: also with regard to this one awaiting that the enemy - that in the case in point, the potential enemy - took the initiative. A mental attitude that will be repeated until to 8 September. Since the entrance into the war the political-military apex has always given the first movement to the adversary or awaited his collapse. The few initiatives have been sudden or thoughtless or one and the other together: the battle of the western Alps, the invasion of the Ciamuria (Greece), the offensive on Sidi el-Barrani.

By now the discussion was well under way and a military mission left for Berlin. The Italian representatives (Generals Favagrossa, Fautilli and Gandin) were received on 30 December by Keitel, than in a preliminary meeting he indicated some premises of the OKW to the negotiations. Given the situation he had to supply at once to the more urgent necessities, for the others necessities to write up a program to long expiration on the basis of the priorities of the single requirements. Of other part the German aid in materials could only embodied after a sure time is because of the transports are for the training of the Italian personnel; therefore it allowed to use at once as much as was found being possible in Italy and replace with supplied as much for Germany. This, of course, was not in conditions for yielding means of Germany but simply material fabrication of war goods, in part, for its part, still not replaced in efficiency, what which it had to supply to the addressee. The last point: the cession of raw materials, many of which insufficient available in the Reich, involved also in Italy a rigorous discipline of employment, with the resource to such processes of fabrication to allow the use of replacement of critical raw materials. For the recorded, it would have been supremely desirable that the Italian requests were formulated a single competent organ military, avoiding the presentation of lists, unavoidably contradictories, from part of several agencies.

At the introduction of Keitel they followed separate conversations. Gen: Jodl touched the operating aspects with Gen. Gandin, Marras the military attaché was present. He expressed, to be honest, with absolute

clarity on two fundamental concepts. The Germans to take part where thought useful, but wished are not put in such situations to compromise the great prestige as conquerors on the European battlefields. Germany had the most absolute certainty of final Victory; even if the war was of long duration, it would not be died of hunger: before it would have made to die of hunger the populations of all the conquered territories. The strategic picture that then was traced was optimal for the German side: the aerial battle against Great Britain was developed effectively, the naval war in Atlantic was putting to hard tries the organization of the supplying of the island, in Rumania soon the assembly of a score of divisions would have had beginning and on the first of March it would have been delivered the offensive against Greece. For the Italian side, in Albania it was necessary to resist at all costs in order not to compromise the development of the German operations through Bulgaria. To this end, if opportune, the OKW was disposed to send in that theater one mountain division. However Italy would have received remarkable advantage from the dispatch of the X *Fliegerkorps* and by the return of the Italian Aerial Corps from Belgium. As far as Libya it did not lack to point out opportunely to the renunciation of Rome to the offered armored division as a "*crisis of confidence*", however now it was dealt also not to lose Tripoli, otherwise all of North Africa would have fallen into enemy hands. German co-operation could be expounded with units of blocking (*Sperrverbände*) in a position to interdict with a few forces, tanks and minefields, long sections of front.

Gandin had listened without interruption. Then taken the words and described situation frankly: in Albania and Libya the events had been put badly and soon could equally happen also in Aegean and East Africa. Therefore Germanic participation was necessary and urgent. In Balcania it could be manifested under shape of emphasized threat through Bulgaria, but in North Africa two armored divisions, only were necessary to be able to reject to the English with one counter-offensive. Jodl also showed that he persuaded that simple snubbing units would not have gotten much effect and that the entity of the aid had to reach the level of a Armored Corp with at least 250 tanks, specifying that every decision was up to the Führer, in those days at *Berchtesgaden*. The first units could be at Naples within three weeks from the decision. For the transports of material eighteen German steamboats available in Italy could be used, while for the personnel the resource to warships seemed surer. In any case to prolong

the resistance of Bardia was tactfully considered of extreme importance and, according to Marras, it could have great influence on the decisions.

In a second talk, Jodl was stopped to illustrate the relationships with France. Given the circumstances and the faithful attitude of Petain, Italy did not have to nourish any worry. In short Jodl appeared very cordial and comprehensive and Gandin, in his report put in evidence the German will to meet the request of an ally. ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

Contemporarily Gen. Fautilli had a long conversation with Gen. Thomas, in which, he assisted by numerous experts, tried to satisfy the previous and new Italian necessities:

total requested by the Italians	offered by the Germans
20 batteries of 88 Krupp A/A. 100 batteries A/A. of 37 or 47	reserved for answer 250 Hotchiss pieces of 25 and 250 Belgian pieces of 47
10 howitzer batteries of 149/30 for coast 100 divisional batteries	48 pieces Schneider from 155 mod. 1917 100 batteries from 100 Skoda mod. 1919 100 howitzers from 105 French mod.1935. unavailable
20 batteries guns of 105 300 guns A/A of 20	50 Czechs 20 mm. auto-cannon with reservoir of answer for the other arms.
Tanks	50 French tanks B 2 of 32 tons 50 French Somua tanks of 23 tons 350 Renault tanks of 12 tons unavailable
Armored Cars 800 trucks radio stations	at once 150 then 650. and perhaps more French. reserve for answer

All added the discussions ⁽⁷¹⁾ were considered satisfactory, however, as still better emerged in the negotiations for the raw materials, arose the large issue of the payment. Gen. Favagrossa was discussing the argument with absolute cognition about cause since a few days before had illustrated to Mussolini with a memorandum the point after six months of war and the forecast for

near future. In that center it had marked that the production of steel only reached "*the indispensable in order not to compromise the life of the country*"; for the anticipated "*the most serious repercussions*" were foreseen; for vanadium and chromium "*it was lived for day by day*"; for the explosives the supplying deficiency stretched to increase in worrisome way; for the armament of the infantry in the autumn of 1942 a would be only reaching ability equal to 30% of the requirements; for the rubber "*the situation is in order to become devoid of hope*" and so on ⁽⁷²⁾. Even if the state of the facts had been intentionally described with more pessimism than as much as the truth did not involve, it was also be a matter always of the most important total burden financial and however indeed payment for Berlin was *conditio sine qua non**.

For a reason or purpose of complementary observation, it would seem that someone between the members of our mission has not shown much enthusiasm on the conclusion of the encounter or the possibility of realization of the agreements, because on 3 January Ciano wrote in his diary one that the Prince of Hesse - wrote of a letter from Hitler for Mussolini - "*asks about the Duce's true feeling toward the Führer, since certain attitudes on the part of the military have created the impression in Germany that the Duce is showing some coolness.*"

Marras had seen correct. The OKW followed with attention the Fate of Bardia and when this fell, explicitly requested an Italian appraisal. The answer of Guzzoni ⁽⁷³⁾ evidently appeared convincing, since on 10 January von Rintelen communicated the decisions of Hitler. For the North African theater of operations he had arranged the preparation of "*an unit provided with tanks, adapted for to reinforce of the defense of Tripolitania*". This could be transferred overseas after the shipment of the Italian armored and motorized divisions "*when the Italian Commander thought it still desirable*". The X *Fliegerkorps* would remain in Sicily, however it had to prepare bases of support in Libya for being in conditions for acting against the British naval bases in Cyrenaica. The determination of Hitler found official reply in order n. 22 of the OKW in dated 11 January:

"The Italian situation in the Mediterranean, where Great Britain arranges against our ally a of preponderant forces, demands for strategic, political and psychological reasons for German aid. Tripolitania must be garrisoned; the danger of a collapse of the front in Albania must be avoided" ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

*Latin = An essential or indispensable element, condition, or with out which not

and on the request to authorize the shipment of two military missions in order to obtain greater explanation on the truth on the two theaters.

Guzzoni consented without difficulty and informed Graziani, who was on tenderhooks and he replied immediately:

"Dear Guzzoni, I have the feeling that among plans, recognitions of experts and relative round trips between Berlin and Libya, we are losing the most precious time. So that competition of German armored units is the probable ends for carrying out when all down here it is liquidated. Much profit tries with every means to accelerating the times (...) could succeed, always in order to make soon, the allocation to the *Ariete* division of an German recon group of some hundred [!] of armored cars (...) strong" ⁽⁷⁵⁾.

On 19 January Mussolini approached *Berchtesgaden*. He was dark and depressed for the fall of Bardia and the loss of Klisura, but brightened up when he was looking to receive from Hitler with affability and without "*hidden condolences*". While the two dictators withdrew and the same made the two ministers of the foreign countries, Guzzoni was received by Keitel and Jodl. It was at first that a military head accompanying Mussolini, and that was success only on the opening question of the OKW. Since Cavallero thought the moment in Albania too much delicate to get away, he replaced Guzzoni. His presentation was simple and precise. In particular requested that the transfer of the German unit to Tripoli was inserted between the departure of the *Ariete* and that of the *Trento*, Jodl did not show difficulty with the principle and picked the occasion in order to communicate that the choice had fallen on the *5th Leichte Division* under the command of Gen. Funck, already departed in order to carry out a reconnaissance in place. The structure of major unit, but various suggestions from Funck on his return from Libya, was the following:

Division Command:

- a reconnaissance group with two armored car companies, a motorized company and a heavy weapons company;
- three *Panzerjaeger* groups, each with three companies of 9-12 antitank pieces of 37 mm. and 50 mm.;
- two machine-gun battalions with antitank crews and one pioneers company each, all on halftracks;
- a mixed anti-aircraft group with guns of 37 mm. and 88 mm.;

fifteen supply columns;
services.

The transport, whose beginning could have place from 15 February, would last for about 45 days ⁽⁷⁶⁾.

Hitler reserved the morning of 20 January for a true and own political-military conference, holding for last argument the North Africa. With regard to it said that to send a armored division it would have been probably cause of a late arrival given the complexity of structure of major unit, but asserted that the *5th leichte* Division would have been much more profit - thesis, in truth, a very debatable one - and that it had been prepared "*holding present that the antitank action is essentially a psychological problem*" - this thesis, also, rather debatable - then passed to the employment. On the tactical plan the light division could give life to antitank obstructions, of course in the picture of an offensive operation, which was not just the thought of Guzzoni and Graziani, at least to the state of the facts. Therefore he insisted on the importance of the Derna-Mechili line "*that must be held at all costs*" ⁽⁷⁷⁾. In part the message on the tactical possibilities of 5th Light ⁽⁷⁸⁾, does not seem to emerge from the exposure a deepened acquaintance of the situation in Libya, or such vision was intentionally vanished in order not to hit susceptibility, especially after the optimistic report of Guzzoni, a report received by the Germans with skepticism.

The talks of *Berchtesgaden* were most important and for the OKW it had neither demanded the presence of an Italian military head: they started the end of the separate war. Mussolini was in too much difficulty, especially in Albania and Libya for being able to make overly subtle distinctions. Already in December had introduced the humiliating perspective of having to ask the participation for the ally in Albania in order to avoid worse. The nomination of Cavallero and then the substitution of Soddu had given again some of equilibrium to the battle underway and now it was hoped to be able to do with less than the Germanic mountain division. Guzzoni, among others, after the conference of Berlin at the end of 1940, had written to Marras in that order left to slip at the opportune moment in private conversations some observations "of prestige". The "*crisis of confidence*" which he had alluded to Jodl instead had been a excess confidence on our means and therefore the issue, "*putting in just these terms*" could not touch the susceptibility of the ally. About

the course of the war against Greece "*If is true that until now, in Albania, they have been had from the failures, but has the certainty of being able to turn over the situation very soon*" ⁽⁷⁹⁾. All discussion that could be implied.

However, in Africa the speech was different: the German tanks turned out indispensable. Sure Mussolini thought that the arrival of the ally overseas did not influence a lot on the Italian conduct of the war, but Hitler - and Jodl had been explicit - he would not have ever allowed that German units put, obviously by the Italians, in situations compromising for the prestige of the Third Reich. Consequently, he would have held under careful surveillance that theater of operations. Truly Hitler nourished still more than a doubt and the fall of Tobruk was in a sure way decisive. Not in as much as unexpected, but because it forced to look reality in the face. Rintelen, that was now listened to in Berlin, had at once informed the OKW that also the line of Derna would have fallen and that therefore, beginning the transport of the 5th *leichte Division* on the 15-20 February, would be lacked the time in order to save Cyrenaica. Moreover, now the circumstances had to think next to something consisting. Gen. Funck, arrived in Tripoli on the 23rd, returned to Berlin at the end of month and on 1 February reports to Hitler on the gravity of the British offensive and on the decision of Graziani to concentrate the last defense around Tripoli. Also with his warning, only the availability of an entire armored body could allow re-conquest of Cyrenaica. Hitler listened in a bad mood: he did not know until that point to leave to engage the German presence in North Africa. Of the other side, if Graziani was limited to defending Tripoli, Libya was entirely lost and there was even the danger that Italy, badly put, would ask a separate peace with incalculable consequences for the Balkans (and operation Barbarossa). On 2 February von Rintelen presented to the Comando Supremo a letter very annoyed as well as clear:

"Per assignment of the Germanic Supreme Command I ask of wanting to answer as soon as possible to the following questions:

- 1) Which directives have been emanated to Marshal GRAZIANI and in which way he has the intention of execution for the further continuation of the war?
- 2) For how much time Marshal GRAZIANI believes of still being able to resist in the Cyrenaica to the English pressure?

3) Within which period the Italian air force in N.A. that, according to the news reaching Berlin, now seems does not have more than 80-100 aircraft available - could it be reinforced in a sufficient way?

4) Would he have the intention to delay with surface naval forces the further occupation of naval bases from part of the English fleet?

5) They will the divisions *Ariete* and *Trento* and the sufficient German Light Division be for the defense of the Tripolitania, until the possibility of their engagement were the English where not penetrated in that province, that is such defense would not be possible at all without huge armored forces" ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

Guzzoni cannot assert that the Comando Supremo had given directives to Graziani, in any case being Graziani own ideas and so completed them: *"successive defense with adequate means in order to obtain to delay enemy movement through desert towards Tripolitania. This will not be defended already around Tripoli, but deploying the forces available so as to obligate the enemy to fight with the desert quicksand to the rear and exposed to our maneuvers counter-offensives with mobile forces on the flank and the rear. Moreover cover will be supplied western frontier and defend south tripolino from dissident French incursions"* ⁽⁸¹⁾. In short, the defensive line ran, a long way, to the height of Sirte. In merit to the other questions, the answers were enough simple: Graziani was doing the possible in order not to be gone around; he was from excluding that he could resist in Cyrenaica long; aviation available at the moment of 90 bombers and 130 fighters and was in course in flow of a the group of forty of aircraft for every specialty; navy had their hands tied since the *Mediterranean Fleet* was preponderant. But on the last question Guzzoni was extremely cautious. The Italian-Germans forces of previewed disembarkation could constitute *"a considerable mobile mass in order to face the enemy"* in this case *"meant to advance"* towards Tripoli after to have 500 old kilometers of sand desert ⁽⁸¹⁾. The precaution seems excessive. *To face significant valid objection, not to arrest* neither at least that little *destroy*. Now, as, it appeared correct to think that O'Connor would have exceeded the sand desert with a pair of divisions or little more, probably worn out, as it was not possible to think of a clean Victory in the certain defensive battle? Doubts could subsist on the outcome of a counter-offensive

to a long range goal, but not sure on local success, naturally to disembark reinforcements.

The message did not satisfy Hitler, which, among other things feared that the German units would not arrive in time. He began with replacing Gen. Funck as the head of the 5th Light, because he appeared much too pessimist, with Gen. Streich. Then suspended (but only for a pair of days) the rail shipments already in action Then finally, although also von Brauchitsch proposed the shipment at least a armored division, wanted to feel out von Rintelen personally. These meetings on 16 February at the Chancery of the Reich and reported:

"The English are in on the point of occupying Benghazi and Agebadia, like the rest of the Cyrenaica: only a few Italian forces will be able to save themselves in Tripolitania. The five Italian Divisions in course of transport cannot alone defend Tripoli. However proceeding for the desert completely lacking of water from Sirte between the Cyrenaica and the Tripolitania will demand to English work job of preparation, and so will be able to have a breath. The defense of Tripoli rests on the Sirte, and has only a possibility of success in the case is entrusted to the strong very mobile group, that he can carry out the defense counterattacking. Without German aid, Libya is lost" ⁽⁸²⁾.

At this point the Hitler decided and the OKW signed the order for operation *Girasole* (Sunflower). According to the German thought the defense had to be carried out much to the east of Tripoli and to be based on the static resistance of one line of obstruction and one maneuvered reaction of the armored troops. Therefore the 5th *leichte Division* would have been reinforced by a tank regiment. Probably the new British offensive would not have been delivered before two months, that involved the completion of the disembarkation of the division before mid March. Not only but, held account of the great importance covered from the conservation of Libya, the shipment of a armored division was previewed that, added to the 5th Light, it would have given life to the *Deutsches Afrikakorps* under the command of Gen. Rommel. Which Rommel, convened at once and informed of the assignment, left with von Rintelen from the study of Hitler commenting: *hellishly difficult job!*"

Mussolini was shown very satisfied and accepted the following agreement:

"The German Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and the Italian Comando Supremo had agreed to the following directives for the employment

of German troops in Italian theaters of operations:

1) The German troops in Libya and Albania will be tactically under the immediate command of the supreme commander in the place. For the rest they depend on the commander of the army, which it holds connection with the competent local Italian commands.

2) There must at least be employed only complete units or complete division. Exceptions are admitted only if, in the judgment of the German commander, the German troops are threatened directly before that they have been able completely to join, or in the case in which it had to take part such a crisis that - where it was not opposed - could derive the loss of the entire theater of operations.

3) Once deployed according to the previewed plan, the German unit must remain united in the hands of the German commander and he does not have to be left again in several areas of the battle front.

4) In the case in which to the German troops came entrusted with a task whose execution, for conviction of their commander, could only carry to a serious failure and therefore the disablement of the prestige of the German troops, the German commander has the right and the duty, informing the German general attaché of the Italian High supreme command in Rome, to ask the decision of the Führer, by means of the supreme commander of the army.

5) The German X Aerial Corps remains under the command of the commander of air force, Reich Marshal Goring. On basis of these the directives, the Aerial Corps acquits its task in tight collaboration with all the interested Italian commanders."

The signatories of Keitel and Guzzoni endorsed the end of the war parallel.

The bilateral contacts were not exhausted with the shipment of the X *Fliegerkorps* to Sicily and of the *Afrikakorps* to Tripolitania. Also the two Navies were oriented to giving a continuation to the program of principle of July 1940. Adm. Riccardi, as chief of general staff and Undersecretary of State of the R. Marina has himself said from 8 December, prepared himself for the appointment and when Raeder, on the first of February 1941, declared himself ready to come to Italy, the proposal was immediately received. The headquarters chosen was Merano and the talks took place on the 13th (two sitting) and 14th (one sitting). Adm. Raeder taken the word in meeting opening proposing that the work

they were carried out on the basis of the reports that each General Staff had prepared circa the appreciation of the own situation and the appraisal of the own operating possibilities. Being in total agreement on this point, was exposed in order before the Germanic report. It put in relief the difficulties faced by the *Kriegsmarine* in order to then improve the initial strategic conditions in the North Sea and, substantially resolved this after the conquest of Norway and the Fiandre, for giving wide development to the war against the mercantile traffic of import towards Great Britain. On the invasion of United Kingdom, Raeder was rather vague. He specified that the planning could be considered ready, but that the operation was seen with many doubts for the difficulty of being able to count on the surprise factor. However, he held to inform that it would perhaps not have been necessary, in as much as the bombing of the *Luftwaffe* and the activity of the submarines probably would have been sufficient to defeat the enemy. To this picture there was little from adding and the comment of Riccardi was of circumstance.

When but he passed himself to the Italian exposure was obvious that the Germans had studied the problem of the Mediterranean and they were not very convinced of the goodness of the line of action chosen by the Supermarina. We say at once that Italian report⁽⁸³⁾ was inspired by a remarkable pessimism. In part he was justified from the situation: loss of the Cyrenaica, the takeover of Crete by Great Britain and the Greek ports, English dominion in the eastern Mediterranean basin and Italian difficulties in that theater. But, as just he had observed⁽⁸⁴⁾, the general tone appeared to have gotten excessive depressed:

"This situation, beyond inhibiting practically whichever serious offensive threat on part of our air forces and naval against the English positions in the eastern Mediterranean subjects to the naval and above all aerial control of England the central Mediterranean; serious efforts will be necessary in order to conserve a control are also limited of the Channel of Sicily, in order to hinder for the as much as possible free use of such passage to advantage of the convoys of supply and the naval forces of the enemy",

and still:

"(...) in these months of war the geographic-strategic situation of Italy in the Mediterranean has endured a deep change, passing to the enough favorable being to a condition clearly

disfavor, which appears considerably aggravated also regarding that one existing to the beginning of the war when potential the French Navy along side the British.

If then the possible integral occupation of the Libya had induced the French authorities of the North Africa to enter the field, of blow the pressure on Italy it would have become strongest is under the aspect of the strategic positions in enemy hand, is under that one of the naval forces to face. And, on purpose of force ratios, he was given for good consistency of the *Mediterranean Fleet* and the rather exaggerated Force H. But where the key was most hurting was in merit to the employment of the Italian fleet. The report supported that "*they exist for insufficient strategic objective and limited us for partial operation*" and that "*the enemy, in his sorties, always has a nucleus of ships superior to the Italian forces that could take part*". The first affirmation was debatable, second the not exact. In conclusion:

"The Italian fleet will be able to continue to acquit, as in last the task holding in the Mediterranean important enemy naval forces, also in hypothesis more unfavorable than the total loss of Libya",

but "*in order not to come less to its functions*" it had need to resume the sure availability of its southern bases and to control with aviation the enemy movements in port and sea. For the German part there was naturally an appreciation for the Italian difficulties, but also a call, also is expressed diplomatically, to greater combativeness. As an example, offensive of fast battleships aimed against the English traffic between Alexandria and Greece they would have been most useful. In part all that, unfortunately not emerged some serious effort in order to promote and to realize a unit of action between the two Navies.

These contacts between the allies of the Axis before that they began to fight side by side in the sands of the desert.

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CHAPTER IV NOTES

1. The regiment, placed under the orders of Col. Piana, was formed from two exploring nuclei, three motorized nuclei (all composed from units arms of accompaniment and artilleries) and two motorized artillery groups, for total of 2,400 men, 62 machine-guns, 18 mortars, 10 flamethrowers, 76 gun, 200 motor vehicles and 120 motorbikes.
2. According to Playfair, eight tanks Italian destroyed and one captured against seven English.
3. DSCSAS, f. 01/1100/Op. dated 21/1/1941, made to transmit by telephone on the 20th.
4. DSCSAS, tele 01/1150 Op. dated 21/1/1941, ore 13:00 hours.
5. DSCSAS, tele 01/1110 Op. dated 25/1/1941 - Appendix 60.
6. DSCSAS, tele 5849, 13:35 hours.
7. DSCSAS. tele 01/1213 Op. dated 27/1/1941 from Graziani to Mussolini, 20:15 hours.
8. The garrison of each fort was constituted by a machine-gun platoon reinforced by one 47/32 gun and by two 75/27.
9. DSCSAS. f. 10 Ris.mo Pers. dated 29/2/1941, with which they came confirm the oral orders given in the previous night.
10. The reconstruction of the enemy deployment made by the information service of the Armed forces high command is not clear.
11. DSCSAS, meeting report appendix 61.
12. DSCSAS, tele 01/1286 Op. dated 29/1/1941. 20:00 hours.
13. DSCSAS, tele 01/1328 Op. dated 30/1/1941.
14. DSCSAS, tele 01/1344 Op. dated 31/1/1941, 13:00 hours, directed to the High supreme command
15. DSCS: tele 5956/Op. dated 30/1/1941, 23:00 hours.
16. DSCSAS. tele: 01/1376 Op. dated 1/2/1941, 15:00 hours.
17. Per diem historian of the *Sabratha* Inf. Div. dated . 4/2/1941.
18. Composed of the III and V medium tank battalion, LX light tank battalion, a armored car platoon, one motorcyclists company of the Savona with two groups, one 105/28 battery, one from 75 CK for a total of 2,500 men.
19. Composed from one 75/27 group, one of 105/28 and a mixed group for total 1.800 men.
20. Composed from two machine-gun platoons with four 20 mm. sections, two 47/32 platoons for total ones 600 men.

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- 21 Initially composed from the 20th artillery grouping Command, III and IV/20th artillery, I/85th infantry, one machine-gun company, four 65/17 batteries, one 47/32 company, four 20 mm. sections, elements of the engineers and services.
 - 22 Initially Composed by the 42nd field artillery Command, I/42nd artillery, III/20th artillery, I/86th infantry, one machine-gun company, one 65/17 battery, one 47/32 company, four 20 mm. sections, elements of the engineers and services. The Colpani grouping, like that of the Moech, had to endure from the 4th strong reductions in relation to the unavailability of motor vehicles. Therefore many units, especially riflemen and machine-gunners, seem that at final the moment they have been left on foot with the respective regiments.
 - 23 Composed from a motorcycle platoon, one 75/27 battery, one 65/17 battery, two 47/32 platoons, three 20 mm. sections. Initially the nucleus Allegros made part of the Colpani grouping.
 - 24 Composed from one company parachutists, one machine-gun company, a 75/27 group, a 47/32 platoon and two 20 mm. sections.
 - 25 Report of Gen. Cona, Tele. 01/709 dated 4/2/1941, 11:10 hours, for the 10th army Commander.
 - 26 For a reason or purpose of example, the groupings of the Della Bona column for a few hours had only received a certain number of motor vehicles for the transport of the troops, but the availability was so meager to render the stacking of three or two 20 mm. machine-gunner or 47/32 guns with a little ammunition on a single truck and the abandonment of all the remaining necessary ammunition.
 - 27 Cona report, Tele. 775/Op Dated 4/2/1941 to the Commander of the XX army corps.
 - 28 Cona report, Tele. 01/714/Op. dated 4/2/1941, 13:25 hours, to the 10th army Commander
 - 29 Cona report, Tele. 01/422, date 4/2/1941, 19:30 hours, to the 10th army Commander.
 - 30 Composed from a 75/27 battery, two 20 mm. sections and two 47/32 platoons.
 - 31 Composed from the XXI medium tank battalion, a machine-gun battalion, a 75/27 group.
 - 32 The defense of Agedabia was constituted from six 75 mm. batteries, located along six kilometers of defensive perimeter, two 100/17 batteries, one Libyan company, one Libyan motor-machinegun company and a mobile nucleus. A anti-tank pit dug in the sand of those flat ground, in part buried, covered the northern and eastern parts of the locality.
 - 33 DSCSAS, Tele. 01/725, dated 4/2/1941.
 - 34 The battle of Beda Fomm has been carried out in particular circumstances therefore and the battles of the three days, 5-7 February, have been very fragmentary that its reconstruction has been revealed very arduous, also because from the Italian side are lacked exhausting and precise reports. For much too often the few reports that arrived they are of evasive or of limited vision of the events.
- However it has been attempted to reach more than one taken care of description as much as possible proceeding for compare, also in order as comprising the forces

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- residual of the 10th Army, also always respectable in connection with those of the enemy, have not succeeded in forcing road towards Agedabia. Beyond to Italian and British official documents, a particular account of two works has been kept: *The tanks* by Liddell Hart and *The crucible of war* by Barrie Pitt.
- 35 The phrase is not sure happy. Taken exactly it seemed to involve the passage of the armored brigade to the direct command of the Commander of the Army Corps, in as much as the rearguard of a major unit. Nothing but to suppose that this was the thought of by Cona in matter of articulation of the forces. Very simply, therefore, it is meant to hold the brigade to the rear of the army corps. The true rearguard was, in fact, the entire Bergonzoli column, that is was not for nothing it had not assumed title of the "Eastern Libya Rearguard".
- 36 Della Dona report and per diem historian of the *Sabratha* Inf. Div., recorded by hand 476/Op. Dated 05/02/1941, 09:45 hours.
- 37 That now the column Della Dona (Moech and Colpani groupings and nucleus Allegros) was found at Ghemines.
- 38 More or less at the same time the Commander of the Army gave to Col. Aimone-Cat, commander of the South-Cyrenaica territory, the order to resist in place to the 10th Bersaglieres and to the Allegros nucleus, that they would be arriving towards 14:00 and that they would have been followed by the entire XX Corps.
- 39 According to Col. Moricca, Gen. Della Dona reached Ghemines at 11:15 approximately and "*he approved of the dispositions given to Allegros as well as my understanding to proceed the column in order to keep contact with Col. Aimone-Cat and to recon the positions around Agedabia*".
- 40 But it does not seem that Gen. Cona has moved finger in order to avoid the Moech and Colpani groupings, objective determining to the aims of the possibility of an action of force, were left behind.
- 41 CORRELL BARNETT, *The generals of the desert*, Milan, Longanesi 1960, p. 85.
- 42 In the report, Della Dona referring to Lt. Col. Allegros, just arrived to Agedabia, communicated to him of having been attacked by five armored car, of having *destroyed* one making the others flee and captured two prisoners. The telegram was sent *pro forma*. Della Dona he declared in fact that: "*At 15:30 approximately the telephone lines between Agedabia and Ghemines they were cut by the enemy (the final telephone conversation made by me with Ghemines, for accelerating the movement of the Moech and Colpani groups, I knew that they had order to move at 16:00 hours from Ghemines for Agedabia). I have tried therefore to correspond with the Commander of the 10th Army by means of radio but uselessly. Also the radio of Benghazi did not answer (...). I then tried of connecting directly by means of radio, with the N.A. Armed forces high command at Sirte - with Sirte there was then no wire link - but not even this was possible. That although I have equally launch messages communicating situation, with the hope of their arriving intact*" (letter to Gen. Roatta dated 31/8/1941).
- 43 Phonogram by hand 477 op. dated 5/2/1941, 16:00 hours: "*As soon as they will arrive you supply to deploy one company 47 mm. guns between the tracks of Sounno and Feus between the two batteries deployed on aforementioned origins. The 20 mm. battery, rather, may to be deployed between the track of Antelat and the roadway of Benghazi. Feels that in the direction of Antelat operates one motor-machinegun squadron of the fort of Agedabia*".

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- 44 Phonogram by hand 479 op. dated 5/2/1941, 16:30 hours: "*As by the orders of the army move your the regiment with the attached units to the northeast front. Reinforce service supervision around the fort perimeter with provisional surveillance and signaling places possibly of the automatic arms. Communicate to me as soon as possible the dispositions given*".
- 45 Cited letter to Gen. Roatta dated 31/8/1941.
- 46 The armored brigade, overran Regima, had to blow up the interruptions and to carry with them the garrison.
- 47 Accompanied by a medical official in ambulance from a very close field hospital, Gen. Tellera died the next day, 7 February, at 06:30. The enemy paid him the military honors at Benghazi.
- 48 Report of Col. Ferruccio Grande dated 8/2/1941 given to the Armed forces high command.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 The material of the salvaged armament included 460 machine guns and automatic rifles, 60 mortars of 45 mm. and 81 mm., 13 machine-guns of 20 millimeter, 17 guns of 47/32, 9 pieces of 65/17, 20 of 75/27 and 20 of 100/17.
- 51 Liddell Hart indicates that 101 Italian tanks were found on the field: 48 hit from 2 pounder projectiles, 14 from grenades of various bore and 39 intact. For the entire 4th armored brigade had the losses of only 4 cruisers, evidently alluding to those destroyed (*The tanks*, cit., p. 61.).
- 52 W. CHURCHILL, op. cited, part II, vol. I, p. 87~8.
- 53 Ibid, p. 93.
- 54 I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 375-376.
- 55 M. MONTANARI, cited Op., p.619-627.
- 56 DSCS, memorandum for the chief of General Staff dated 6/2/1941.
- 57 Memoranda for minister of the War and Chief of the S.M.G.I. dated 6/1/1941 - appendix 62.
- 58 He had yielded four smaller divisions and total units for 55,000 armed men, 140 tanks, 615 guns and 2,600 motor vehicles.
- 59 DSCS, Tele. 2406 Op. dated 9/9/1940, 16:20 hours.
- 60 DSCS, f. 6239/Op. dated 6/2/1941 - appendix 63.
- 61 DSCS, Tele. 12 Op. TR. for the Duce, dated 7/2/1941.
- 62 DSCSAS, Tele. 01/1580 Op. dated 9/2/1941- appendix 64.
- 63 DSCS, Tele. 6330 Op. dated 11/2/1941, 13:00 hours.

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- 64 The communication was consequent to a note with which Mussolini had "*Ask the Air Force an immediate and massive effort (not inferior to 500 aircrafts between Italians and Germans) that in the area of strategic bombing incessantly the ports of the Cyrenaica and in the tactical area with three advanced columns*" (DSCS, memorandum dated 11/2/1941).
- 65 "Today in the most inopportune moment - Graziani to the Supreme Command telegraphed - his effected a change of commander of the aerial quadrant" (DSCSAS, Tele. 6 R.P. dated 5 February).
- 66 DSCSAS, tele. R.P. dated 8/2/1941, 16:00 hours .
- 67 DSCS, tele. 6287 Op. dated 9/2/1941, 13:30 hours.
- 68 DSCS, Tele. 18 RR.P. dated 11/2/1941, 13:25 hours
- 69 R. Graziani, op cited, p 238-239
- 70 Marras Doc., f. 2592/A dated 31/12/1940 - appendix 65.
- 71 DSCS, report of talks appendix 66.
- 72 C FAVAGROSSA, *Perché perdemmo la guerra*, Rizzoli, Milan 1946.
- 73 Cited appendix 59.
- 74 E.RINTELEN, op. cited, p.113.
- 75 DSCSAS, Tele. 01/457 Op. dated 12/1/1941, 15:45 hours.
- 76 DSCS, report appendix 67.
- 77 DSCS, report conference with Hitler - appendix 68.
- 78 Von Rintelen, present at the meeting as interpreter of the German side had to write: "*Hitler launched then into technical disquisitions on armored onslaught and the way of defending oneself. These his military explanations made great impression on those present (op, cited, p. 117) and Ciano annotated, with the separation a scornful retort of "who knows", that "That our military some of them are impressionable, Guzzoni (...) notices with profound surprise the military acquaintance of Hitler"* (op. cited, p. 501). Probably the surprise referred to the bottom difference in the interests of military nature of the two dictators.
- 79 DSCS, f.5248 dated 7/1/1941.
- 80 DSCS, f.51/41 dated 2/3/1941.
- 81 DSCS, f. 6088/op. dated 3/2/1941,
- 82 E. RINTELEN, op. cited, pp, 120-121.
- 83 Memoranda n. 31 dated 10/2/1941-appendix 69.
- 84 A. JACHINO, *Tramonto di una grande marina* cit, p. 251-257 and 320-332, and *Gaudo e Matapan*, Mondadori, Milan 1963. 3rd edition, p. 293-298.

Chapter 5

CLOSING REMARKS

On January 6, 1941, at the fall of Bardia, Eden wrote to Churchill that "*never has so much been surrendered by so many to so few*" (never, has so much, been surrendered to so few). The sentence was repeated, but could be at the end of the whole offensive O'Connor. Just pride for the beautiful and brilliant victory, certainly not dreamed of before *Compass*. Ungenerous and above all, inexact expression. In history wars there is plenty of choice to demonstrate how it is almost normal that a few, but well armed, have a lot of success, verses poorly armed. After all, the war - said the Fuller - you essentially translates into a question of armaments; in other words it is a problem scientific and industrial problems with quality and quantity He added that the first to introduce a distinctly aristocratic principle in the examination of the technical factor was Engels, in spite of his socialism, saying that the quality will always triumph quantity.

To ignore the undeniable goodness of this thesis, in fact it was quite well known since ancient times, so that, today, opponents and allies-which certainly does not have labored in appreciation favorable to us -they judged without hesitation very difficult the match of the 10th Army against the British XIII Corps. And, on the other hand, the key determinant of the weakness of the armored forces will frequently touched by Wavell, this time in his own justification, during the first Italian - German counter-offensive ⁽¹⁾ For his part, Liddell Hart, who studied the campaign under the specific profile of the war of tanks; he could say "Ultimately it is undeniable that the destruction of an entire army in this short campaign of four battles was mainly due to the decisive action of the 7th Armored Division and the 7th Royal Tank Regiment"⁽²⁾. As for the Germans, in July 1940, Halder had to recommend "heartily" to von Rintelen - provoking from Rome the request of German tank units to Libya, having been convinced right from the previous year that Italy was severely lacking in this area. And the same Rintelen said. "*For a quick and resounding success it would be a prerequisite the possession of an armored army*"

and a secure supply line "⁽³⁾ Even Rommel had no uncertainty about the causes of the defeat.

"The failures of Graziani was caused mainly by the fact that much of the Italian army, not being motorized, in the open expanse of the desert was at the mercy of the British, weaker but fully motorized" ⁽⁴⁾

This initial situation no one can ignore the weight it fatal to blame the commanders in Libya. Of it were responsible ministers and military leaders at the highest level. Knowing that all military departments were in the hands of Mussolini for years and years is the obvious conclusion. Finally, while giving a very broad responsibilities to junior ministers, who were all military and moreover - a part Soddu – they covered the office of Chief of Staff of the armed forces. On the other hand it is essential to bear in mind that one person, literally, he wanted the war. Mussolini. And although he wanted to know the shortcomings of the military course it was far from imagining that he was about to plunge over a cliff; he believed, blindly convinced that the conflict had already won by the Germans. He thought of this opportunity to get on the bandwagon without risk spending it within a few months, however, the risk is pointed out in all its gravity and spending appeared unbearable. Even in this regard can not be denied responsibilities to leading members of the national life, in the political as in the military, in diplomacy as in that of finance. Limiting the nod to the military, we should agree that some huge mistakes were purely technical, that is military: the concept of a war to lead remaining on the defensive, the lack of understanding of the primary importance of the theater of operations in the Mediterranean, the absence of a project - if not a plan - for the continuation of the struggle against Britain after the collapse of France, the almost complete lack of ideas on the use of armor, convinced acceptance of the concept of parallel war, the lacking vision of a Supreme Command level secretariat, the demobilization of the army in the conflict started and when it was clear that Germany had not won the war (October 1940), the inconceivable adventure in Greece.

The wars of Abyssinia and Spain generated illusions and gave false experiences. The main protagonists from those campaigns

came out with deserved honors and glory were Badoglio, Graziani, Berti. Everyone had a part -of the primary work in the events that took place in North Africa until February 1941 Then the shipwreck of those operations was total - army destroyed⁽⁵⁾ and the other reduced to little or nothing - is natural to ask what mistakes have been committed and to what extent they have affected the result.

"You have to admit - was written on Badoglio - the energy, the will of one of the greatest architects of Vittorio Veneto, the winner in Ethiopia, had eased, rather than age, with the knowledge that it was opened a chasm in which Italy would fall "⁽⁶⁾ is reduced to try to avoid the worst, but without the hardness and the necessary bite. Then the worst happened. As for Graziani, probably it was placed in front of a task too big for him, both as Chief of Army Staff and as supreme commander in Libya, but the blame must fall on those who chose, for such duties, knowing he did not have adequate knowledge or familiarity with the highest organ of the army command, and despite knowing the characteristics of his career, essentially colonial and therefore not in contact with the use of large complex metropolitan units. Moreover the conflict was known personnel with Badoglio, so in the discipline of intelligence there was not much to be expected. However his action as supreme commander is deemed necessary to assign blame alone. Just one, but very serious. Apart from impulsivity and the suddenness with which sank to enthusiasms and depressions, Graziani saw quite clearly the danger of stopping at Sidi el-Barrani, to close in Bardia and Tobruk, to be bypassed by at Mechili. But it can not argue that he acted at all times as he was convinced that they must act. At least according to the impression gained from the examination of his correspondence with the Comando Supremo, it seems to have willingly sought, expected and received orders over before moving in one direction or another. It is true that the directives of Mussolini conceded little room, however Graziani not ever opposed a no cut, or struggled to impose their point of view.

His arrival in Tripoli to replace Balbo was well received by the public. The population of Libya, and mainly that of the provinces Cyrenaica, expressed a sincere pleasure when Graziani took command of the armed forces in North Africa because he believed it would seek to remedy the deficiencies attributed to Balbo. The great trust placed in

him stemmed from the fact that, as a man of action considered, determined, daring and bold, was known to his custom to prepare methodically each operation and by the certainty that he would defend at all costs the Cyrenaica, very dear to him. In fact, Derna and Benghazi were left many families with women and children. After the fall of Bardia this trust was gradually diminishing. Moreover in the military already he had appeared long before Graziani changed since the idea came from the press and from older employees and its action inspired by a carefully considered even excessive. Sure it is that he also did not know the possibilities and the needs of mechanized combat in the desert; while giving him the excuse of conscious inferiority qualitative means, it was always hesitant to take head this kind of struggle and purpose to move towards compromise solutions: the use of light and medium tanks throughout the campaign proved it. Third character Gen. Berti. He was a distinguished and well-trained officer of the General Staff, he arose particularly in light in 1938, in the middle phase of Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War, first as deputy commander and later as commander of the Volunteer troops. Arrived in Libya to take command of the 10th Army just at the outbreak of hostilities, he was soon "suffocated" by Graziani, which in turn was down by Mussolini. And that obviously did not help to calm the environment. It could also point out how all the military leaders Italians in North Africa the only one to have some familiarity with the armor was Gen. Babini, which in Spain had got to employ light tank units, albeit in a tactical environment and very particular natural. It is true that this might have a relative weight, as was immediately to have the natural feeling that, in the field of employment, exceed the technical knowledge and compete with the experience - not Napoleon said that the tactic is a matter of tact, that of sensitivity? - However, in all Italian conduct of the operations are undoubted the presence of a shyness in the use of armor, that at least in some circumstances was not justified, and a conception of use not live up to circumstances. Finally, one last important. Italian leaders failed to the man in possession of charisma. Balbo had it, who, however, prematurely disappeared from the scene; it seemed Graziani had it, who however soon disappointed. Bergonzoli was popular, but his

role after Sidi Barrani was increasingly limited.

Armament and training we talked about earlier. The first could be considered more or less satisfactory for infantry weapons, mostly obsolete and less than the material supplied to British troops for the artillery, clearly "wrong" for armored vehicles.⁽⁷⁾* Training of cadres and the unit as a whole was poor for the infantry, the artillery for good, not classifiable as conditioned by the paucity of the means for the tank crews. On the doctrine of use, then, it is obvious: it had grandmothers vigor at the outbreak of the conflict were based largely on combat in hilly or flat terrain with tactical holds, namely regarded as the star of the dismounted infantry battle. The use of the armored units (much more than the divisions) was seen on a plane very theoretical because, among other things, regulation (December 1938) gave for the available medium tanks (still under construction) and heavy (in the design). Ultimately, the mechanized war in North Africa was faced with an operational tool unsuitable. The criticism of this is easy, but do not forget that elsewhere, but with the construction of tanks and armored vehicles worthy of the name and equipment of vehicles in line with the times, conservatism and skepticism had the better of the new ideas Liddell Hart in all his work on the World War II was keen to stress how much of the credit for the success of the British XIII Corps should be attributed to the Gen. Hobart, commander of the 7th Armored Division from its constitution in Egypt in 1938 to autumn 1939, when he was replaced in command for his theories on the use of an armored force in a strategically independent of the traditional forces⁽⁹⁾. In France the "Vers l'Armee de métier" of De Gaulle had been followed more by controversy and no acceptance, indeed even because of undoubted excessiveness, which from an objective analysis, with the results known. And even in Germany, almost all the top generals were extremely doubtful about concrete possibilities to realize strategic stakes in the war in depth with armored masses. Guderian had to endure violent criticism of the armored arm, deemed to be unable to withstand long journeys, when the 2nd *Panzerdivision* entered in Vienna in 1938 with 30% of tanks damaged by mechanical failures⁽¹⁰⁾ and, before the Polish campaign, in Halder "armored divisions were not at all a genius." Gen. von Manstein, Chief of Staff of the Army Group A, on the Western Front,

*Foot note #8 does not appear in the text of this page, but should be close to #7 dealing with the Italian Army's readiness.

7. See. M. MONTANARI, op. cited, pp. 230-252.

8. Ibid , pp. 258-277.

he was even sent to command a corps of infantry when in November 1939 he wanted to support the project to break through in the field of Sedan.

The state of the army of uncomfortable from the first contacts with small armored or mechanized units, which was immediately recognized by Balbo and admitted by Graziani. He tried to find something to oppose the enemy. Since the light tanks was impossible to reckon in every respect, for that war to the mechanical; because seventy wagons M 11 with which the situation would be dominated - to use the expression of Badoglio – they were yet to come, he appealed to the "mobile columns". There and then it seemed an acceptable solution, always in the field of transition, but soon emerged the negative aspects: they were full of fire, it is true, as composed almost entirely of pieces of small arms and machine guns, but their own constitution did not allow - in the event of a direct confrontation with opposing units - that the front stop, and that at best a slightest outflanking maneuver by the enemy was bound to embarrass the column for that linked to the vehicles, not suited for desert, and good roads or trails. The use of such columns perhaps reached its highest level since the fall of Bardia. In mid-January, drawing mostly from the *Sabratha* Division, the XX Corp command had, among other things, provided for the formation of a grouping of a motorized recon units (a Bersaglieri motorcyclists company and two sections of 20 mm), three nuclei motorized (each an average of a battery of 65/17, a 75/27, a 20, two platoons of 47/32, a machine-gun company, a radio unit and a supply unit) and three groups motorized (75/27 or from 105/28). Roughly the units had to act with fire from a distance or with anti-tank action when in contact with enemy mechanized elements; But this is remarkable - admitted the necessity of the use of unregulated formations, it was not codified; usage, they were not branched standards and guidance were not even shown the employment criteria.

Yet it was to use means very disparate and wheeled against armored fluidity of betting very dangerous. Necessarily, therefore, the success of these units became linked to the ability of the individual commander, designated for the occasion, which, not supported by specific technical training will be sufficient provisions, he was forced to rely on their own personal qualities of imagination, clarity of ideas, not only energy, but

in the same composition of the units does not appear placed in relation to a demand media or to a specific task. It seems rather that it was linked to the availability of guns and trucks, without reference to an idea tactic. The aforementioned group, in fact, participated with the bulk of its combat forces at a meeting of Mechili (January 24), with a part of Babini Brigade, and then disappeared, absorbed by new groupings of forces created by the retreat, but also - as you know - not inspired by a precise vision operational. You do not have documents about variants occurred later; however on February 4, the eve of the Battle of Beda Fomm, there were the following complex tactical grouping Pasquali and Allegri units (infantry and artillery), Bignami grouping (machine gunners - artillery - tanks), Moech, Colpani and Piana groupings and Ferrara group (artillery), Crucilla grouping (machine gunners and artillery). The last three, together with the Babini brigade, were part of Eastern Libya Rearguard, the articulation of which frankly does not identify the criteria. In some cases it is likely that the genesis of the measure is to be found in the determination of the garrison of a location or of a particular action, but on the whole it is hard to believe the total cost breakdown of organic constraints. This fact was the concrete result. At the Battle of Beda Fomm they showed up in succession of time units put together hastily, without cohesion, without disciplinary structure, with improvised leaders, whose action is also hampered by deficiencies found in the organs of control and connection. We will come back on the subject, especially in relation to the intervention of the Babini brigade.

The 1940-1941 campaign is broken into two phases: the Italian advance of Sidi el-Barrani and the British counter-offensive. The advance know the origins and motivations, hesitations and discussions. Graziani would rather stop at the Halfaya ridge and would have done well. He executed the order without conviction and left it to be implemented badly. The defensive line taken in Sidi Barrani been severely affected by premature judgments and upbeat demeanor taken from opponent when driving forward, of an erroneous assessment of the forces and intentions of O'Connor, an insufficient appreciation of the possibilities of armored vehicles in desert, deficient air and land reconnaissance, an inadequate information service, which in some cases took the information provided from reconnaissance deductions totally at odds with the real situation. So that the "issue of time" of O'Connor

swept over the Libyan divisions group and XXI Corps was the first mistake; However, if you look closely, the real conceptual mistake perhaps was to not have changed the order of the 10th Army, made an army corps as maneuverable as possible was to play the game with that, renouncing divisions left with no transport be used only as base garrisons, and at the same time, not having studied a defensive tactic against the armored attack, relying mainly on artillery and minefields. Nor; it is argued that the result would not have changed in the face of the *Matilda*, as the Italian side is not even aware of their existence.

The raid operation *Compass* became clear immediately profitable and exploitable. By now Graziani was seized by the throat: the naval support did not exist, one from the air rapid lost altitude, the columns were badgered by – the second by the situation described by the information service - a couple of armored divisions, a Australian - New Zealand Army Corp. and a second group of five or six divisions, richly truck equipped. It is likely that this belief of superiority not only qualitative but also quantitative exercised a severe psychological pressure on Italian leaders, creating a sense of the futility of efforts. Of course it is the first choice of the measures to be taken to prevent the enemy from spreading after Sidi el-Barrani was addressed under the impression of a unstoppable stream of armored. Failing to strike up a barrier on the embankment of Halfaya, it was to decide whether to mass on Bardia, Tobruk or both. We know that Mussolini ordered him to hold both the "Fortresses", as they were euphemistically called, and Graziani who shared the idea. It was certainly a mistake. Bardia as a port had no meaning for either the 10th Army or the British XIII Corp,. The real bases were valid Sollum and Tobruk. He lost the first, I might as well focus on the second. The defense of Bardia constituted only loss of energy, it seems valid the concept of setback that should have imposed the enemy: O'Connor could confine itself to secure it with few troops and focus on Tobruk. Bardia, isolated, and bombarded from the sea and the sky, with no prospect of a counter-offensive savior, was doomed.

"Their experience of the difficulties of supply, by a major land force in relevant distance - was commented on by the adversary, the Italians would have to prove that the best way to curb the advance of the British was to

prevent the British to occupy the port of Sollum ^{“(11)}.

Instead Sollum was never evaluated in its real importance and direct most of the troops available on Bardia compromise without compensation the defense of Tobruk.

About the fall of the two fortresses there is little to add to what has already been exposed. On the British side the success involved less effort than expected. Let's just say that without the heavy tanks maybe things would have been a bit differently; They not at all Australians entered Tobruk whistling "*Waltzing Matilda*" (Matilda dance the waltz). But we also say that perhaps the defense - of course apart from the numerous acts of real courage of individuals and small units - lacked anger, conviction, that *animus pugnandi** that according to Clausewitz is the only one that provoke coagulates of all energies to achieve a purpose. And perhaps also he lacked strong leadership.

Among the comments on the operation of this time facing the same question that the situation getting out of hands of the Commands at the highest level. It is surprising, for example, that the size of the guns available in Tobruk as of December 25 reported by Gen. Pitassi Manella, who by the way was a skilled gunner, was so different from that under which performed said calculations to supply ammunition by a delegation of the intendenza for Eastern Libya:

Artillery (Bore)	According to Fort Command	According to the Intendenza
20 mm	36	7
47/32	43	126
65/17	9	5
75/27	32	88
100/17	62	30
105/28	15	36
120/25	12	16
149/13	48	24
149/35	8	8
75/46	12	24

*Latin = to fight with animus

Probably in either calculation include units already started or scheduled arrival (as the only unit in the coming period, the 55th Artillery, was quoted in part in both lists), however it is undeniable the perplexity on the efficiency of the ammunition supply.

At this point, and before examining the retreat from the *Jebel*, you have to touch the topic of the soldier's morale and, better yet, the psychological atmosphere in Libya on the whole.

"The advance of Sidi el-Barrani was filled with jubilation and the population had not been listened to the few who objected it being a success of limited value, since the British had retreated without much engagement. Being however entered Egyptian territory It constituted a source of pride for all and confirmed the safety of the city away from the front would not have suffered harassment whatsoever even by the *Royal Air Force*. Instead own the night was celebrated the occupation of Sidi el-Barrani and took place on first alarm in Benghazi and in the night the city was an air raid with significant damage to the merchant vessels and warships, in the harbor. The citizens, who until then had almost "ignored" the rest of the war as happened in Italy - he was taken panic and there was a hurried exodus to the *jebel* and the South Bengasino. Calm returned when air raid shelters were prepared. On the contrary Derna was quiet despite the most frequent British offense aerial offensive that quickly led the enemy at the gates of Bardia He produced great surprise, but the severity of the situation was felt in Cyrenaica when civilians observed that the military commands were taking precautionary measures for possible further retreat. Only at the end of January, the people realized that the threat concerned the entire region, but it was late and many families could not get away for the insufficiency of the means of transport and the short time available. It was the moment when criticism began to invest more and more decidedly to the military Commander and political authorities. The first was charged poor ability in the conduct of operations and poor energy: became generally widespread impression that more impulse could have avoided the disastrous events in progress. The latter, whose action was held to be equal to the seriousness of the hour, was taken charge of neglecting the interests of thousands of national, not taking timely appropriate action. Even the radio propaganda was bluntly criticized for the way in which it was made

and, above all because, unlike the English (listened to in secret), it was abstract topics and proved unconvincing.

If Derna including the likelihood of being involved in the fight because of defensive works implemented from January 14, it was living in Benghazi substantial lack of concern even after the fall of Bardia opinion was rather widespread, even in the responsible, that the city was not occupied by the enemy and was not initiated any defensive work nor on the outskirts of the town or in the immediate vicinity Only in the last days of January they were mined the access roads, bridges and embankments of the *jebel*. In Misurata and Tripoli warned the backlash with the arrival of the first refugees from Cyrenaica Misurata, evidently, was in greatest tension is starting to see the first soldiers in disorderly retreat, it was known in Sirtica that there was no shadow in the idea of resistance and lacked the means to evacuate westward to Tripoli, though apprehension, the news of the imminent arrival of German armored divisions kept hope alive that the British offensive would not come that far.

That the environmental framework described by the headquarters ⁽¹²⁾ For the troops, their morale was very high until the flare up of the battle of Sidi el-Barrani. The great mass of the soldiers expressed feelings of patriotism, adherence to the aims of the war (which is not well identified), dislike of "*perfidious Albion**", but there was no doubt that the regulation could not be said to be deeply felt nor, least, seriously applied. Simply put, the regulatory regime was relaxed ⁽¹³⁾. Of course, there were reasons. The first can be found in the lack of sensitivity shown by the Central Authority in relation to emotional feelings of staff during the war not only was always complained about the unsatisfactory operation of the mail, lack completely unacceptable, but also severely felt was the lack of rotation departments in the forefront and too rare licensing, except for compelling family reasons or for convalescence. They cropped so that signs of fatigue, diminished vision - announced and supported by all the commands - a short war, were beginning to translate into impatience, depression and physical fatigue. The second reason lay in the big problem of cadres, that the huge majority were represented by reserve officers and recalled from leave. "*Many of them* - according to reports of headquarters - *have demonstrated little*

* Perfidious Albion is an Anglophobic pejorative phrase used within the context of international relations and diplomacy to refer to alleged acts of diplomatic sleights, duplicity, treachery and hence infidelity (with respect to perceived promises made to or alliances formed with other nation states) by monarchs or governments of Britain (or England) in their pursuit of self-interest and the requirements of realpolitik.

education, insufficient military spirit and the limited capacity of moral resistance." Evidently, the defect was not easily or quickly repaired because it came from the selection and preparation of the officers: it was, in essence, a matter of "the system". They were seen early symptoms by the advance on Sidi el-Barrani, it had to see worse during the retreat from Benghazi.

Operation *Compass*, among other favorable circumstances, found itself also a psychological situation substantially unsuitable to support a violent action. The initial failure was justified by the lack of means, so in a short time spread the belief that if they had not had appeared armored reinforcements would not be possible to counter the advance of the opponent:

"The soldiers gradually lost confidence in the weapons they were equipped and the tank and the armored car of the enemy appeared to them, invincible. This belief, carried among the rear after the battle of Marmarica by the stragglers, it produced a real panic of armored vehicles, which rapidly infected all troops. From someone has been found that the persuasion of the officers was poor, because they all felt, and in any event, ineffective.

It is known that there have been incidents of heroism both individual and collective, but it is believed that our troops could have put up a more effective resistance (...) "⁽¹⁴⁾.

Even before the retreat began to leak from *jebel* appreciation very little favorable to the Comando Superiore and these appreciations, formulated in the heat of the moment (early February), deserve to be reported without comment:

1. " - even if desired by Rome, the advance on Sidi el-Barrani should not have been made if the means were not sufficient:
2. - the long break for the construction of the road and the aqueduct was a serious mistake, then that would give the enemy as long as necessary to make careful preparation:
3. - in the known report [Graziani] asserted that there was no surprise. And indeed it should not be, because - apart from information services and aerial observation-was known that several convoys of ships had crossed the Mediterranean and had landed troops and materials in Egypt. But then it becomes inexplicable why not

- adopted necessary measures to prevent the destruction of entire divisions;
- 4 -even if you did not have a wealth of resources, our armored units and artillery - is said - they could have a more beneficially used, and in fact were sacrificed is common knowledge that the British between Sidi el-Barrani and Tobruk They were able to capture approximately 1,000 guns, with which could be put in place a powerful barrier;
 - 5 -on the whole it thinks that, even if you want to attribute part of the blame in Rome, that it would not leave freedom of action, more and more serious would be the fault of those who would compromise the fate of the campaign on the Libyan front, for failing to use the troops and the means available. "

As an obvious consequence *"now it has created an atmosphere of distrust of the Commanders."*

We come now to the second-last act: the resistance on the line Derna-Mechili and retreat towards Benghazi. We say openly that the direction given by Graziani to operational problem, when Cyrenaica appeared open to British ambitions, not persuasive. O'Connor admitted that proceeded towards Benghazi along the main coastal and interior, close to the southern slopes of the plateau of Barce there, it was to identify an alignment of positions suitable to arrest him and guess where he gravitated to the main effort. According to Mussolini and Graziani so-called ridge of Derna lent itself to the task and the crossroads of Mechili was with it in such relationships tactical sought to complete the defensive line. Actually we have already seen that Derna-Berta and Mechili were not in the system, however, accepting this choice it followed a rigid solution: *Jebel* on defense in place, in the desert of battle of tanks, of course to accept in terms of advantage. There was no alternative, since the only really exists - the abandonment of Cyrenaica-it was hardly feasible to Graziani.

On January 24, when an incident occurred favorable for our weapons, battle of Mechili, between the Babini Brigade and the motorized group and the English 4th Armored Brigade, but it was the beginning of many troubles. Tellera worried for the Babini Brigade and contradictory orders - not to get involved in a single enemy action in Mechili and maintain maximum freedom of maneuver and efficiency to prevent the penetration towards Benghazi

- Replaced the general concept of defense to the bitter end, even; partially operated, that of a static defense to the north and south of an elastic defense. In other words, blew the solution, good or bad, it was. Graziani there and then reacted sharply but then came to be plagued by the fear of losing all the tanks in one blow. Conceding that all the wrongs they had - and then, however, that the much-advocated line Derna Mechili was really meaningless tactical - he had to take the matter in hand and find a different solution the "Grappa of Libya" did not make sense. He came back, ultimately, to the one that we originally referred to as solution could hardly be envisaged: the abandonment of the *jebel* and the whole of Cyrenaica. Instead Graziani on January 26 ordered Tellera to break away and maneuver in retreat "*just in case the enemy developments forces in the movement from Mechili of Benghazi.*" It is obvious that at the very moment in which he had reached this certainty the remains of the 10th Army would lose the opportunity to leave the *jebel* for lack of time. After three days without hesitation and that event had provided some elements sure about the intentions of O'Connor, Graziani was persuaded that the enemy sought to turn from the south all the forces of Tellera, as you well now, *cutting the jebel from Mechili towards Cyrene.* Therefore the known meeting of the 29th at Berta, at the Headquarters of the XX Corp, gave the green light to the withdrawal through three successive positions, with the Armored Brigade on the full plateau to protect the exposed flank. The interdiction of the Mechili - Benghazi track, from which the Brigade now was near fifty kilometers as the crow flies, it was left to the small detachments at el-Abiar and Regima.

Basically, from December 23, when it was accepted the idea of stopping the battle position of Derna-Berta-Mechili where Bardia and Tobruk had fallen or even more simply; January 9, distribution of the directives, on Jan. 29, when it was decided the abandonment of the positions involved, nothing happened not expected or feared. But only at the last minute it was admitted that to hold the *jebel*, with the southern flank "for air", had no meaning in the war of tanks. This error cost him the loss of the XX Corps, or at least, it strongly contributed,

In addition to the impact of a technical nature, including the difficulty of organizing an orderly retreat of the infantry; there were also psychological, which were added to an already shaken morale. The emphasis and the rhetoric with which Graziani had organized and claimed the defense on the ridge of Derna

they had been taken up, for understandable reasons of professional ethics, the subordinate commands. As a result

"We spared from criticism the high command abandon surprise from enemy attack - told the headquarters in Benghazi - and appears inexplicable still the easy optimism of some military authorities that, when the enemy was already at the gates of Derna, asserted that it would be He that was arrested and beaten."

Not only that, but nothing is perhaps more disconcerting for the troops to hear proclaim the unbreakable will to "die on the spot rather than give in" and then see that after the first clashes the same Command prefer the reverse, without the enemy has even set a real battle.

It was mentioned that some cause for concern in dealing with a armored combat and Graziani had Telleria At that time they could count on 138 M.13 tanks: the 57 elderly tanks of the III and V Tank Battalions and the 45 brand new of the VI and 36 of the XXI, just arrived from Italy. Of the M.11 tanks had been just a platoon that was in Derna; of light tanks could not be taken into account. Now, a mass of about 140 medium tanks, supported by artillery and much, unfortunately, little by aviation, could bear a comparison with the 7th Armored Division? According Graziani obviously not, because he relied on the figures provided by the information service: the only the 4th Armored Brigade seemed possessed 150 tanks ⁽¹⁵⁾! In fact, the 7th Armored Division was left with 50 *cruisers* and 95 light tanks, as well as some ten armored cars. Which it means that O'Connor, though he tried in every way to engage Babini to eliminate him, once warned by the aerial survey of the presence of another eighty medium tanks, that could not have known to be still in the process of amalgamation, very probably would rather not deal with the fight in the open field in those conditions. Not for lack of confidence in his threadbare squad; not for fear of the M.13, which already knew the flaws, but because it wanted to use every favorable opportunity but not to take any unnecessary risks. Waiting ten days he could count on two other regiments of *cruisers*, those of the 2nd Armored Division arriving from the Delta, and then success would not have escaped him.

Incidentally, Graziani has long insisted on having decent tanks. Knowing that the materials of the expected *Ariete* division would not

have solved anything, he had asked at least change the armament of light tanks, consisting, as it is known, two twin machine guns in casemates Guzzoni replied on February 1, taking away even that hope. 20 mm. Machine guns could not be applied because they were too bulky and requiring special installation; machine guns 12.7mm. from aircraft showed the defect of excessive heating; those 13.2 mm. from ships could go after the replacement of the front plate of the tank, but do not exist in sufficient quantity; the big *Solothurn* rifles were also numerically unavailable. *Ergo* as the only solution left to replace the light tank with the medium, of course when the situation had allowed. In late January 1941, the situation of the M 13 in Italy was as follows: 8 tanks at the school for the training needs of Bracciano, about ten in Genoa ready for boarding, 25 in the course of testing, 60 out of the factory The complete program annual production included 65 tanks at the end of February, 70 in March, 80 in April, 85 in May, 90 in June, 95 in July and 100 monthly from August to December a total of 1,045 new tanks for the year 1941. With an advance just a few months in political decisions and with clarity of ideas in the strategic field, as would have been different things! It is true that even within the technical and tactical concepts were far behind. Referring to M 13 - M 11 tanks were immediately appeared as completely inadequate - Liddell Hart said that the inferiority in comparison with the Italian *cruiser* depended mainly on two factors: the tendency to shoot in motion, resulting in enormous difficulties to hit the target, where the British tanks crews were trained to shoot stopping for the time strictly necessary and possibly to the hull down, and the unavailability of radio, with obvious serious problems in the easiest maneuver tank units ⁽¹⁶⁾. In this regard it is worth highlighting that in Italy the question was still being defined, while in Britain, since the establishment of the 1st Armored Brigade (1934) it was agreed that the only means of communication of the armored formation was to be the radio, until then part of the platoon ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The last leg of the *via crucis** of the 10th Army was Beda Fomm. In surprise tactics and the technique of Sidi el-Barrani, the moral failure at Bardia and Tobruk, in the same operational uncertainty on the embankment of Derna, a lot can be a mitigating. To retreat from Benghazi hardly it seems acceptable as a mitigating factor. Sorry

* *via crucis* = way of the cross, route Jesus took on the way to crucifixion.

to admit it, but the few documents, the facts, the evidence at various levels, the enemy's comments seem to show unanimously that this retreat was held as part of a major disruption. In war going on, but weighed setting errors and executive mistakes: the same negative factors that will lead, according to Wavell, the "*disastrous episode*" of the initial phase of the British retreat not far from el-Agheila, during which the 3rd Armored Brigade "*dissolved practically without much fight, while the inexperienced Commander of the 2nd Armored Division seemed to have lost control. In part this was due to inexperience of personnel providing links*"⁽¹⁸⁾ The fact that the premises for the disorganization were and in abundance: increasingly low morale, intermixing of units, messy outflow from the *jebel*, disorientation about the opponent's moves, overlapping controls, deficiencies in reconnaissance, deficiencies in broadcast, shortcomings in the action command

The fundamental mistake was to underestimate the possibility that the desert offered to the enemy go to Mechili toward Ajdabiya to cut off the retreat of the 10th Army that was not ignored this possibility, however, was considered sufficient guard positions and Abiar - Regima and Ajdabiya ; the effects on intermediate Balbia had to be guaranteed in the succession of the phases from the rear of Bergonzoli. Worse, were also underestimated the boldness and tenacity of O'Connor evidently was deemed highly unlikely that the British General throw himself with his armored forces through 250-300 kilometers of desert in a frantic race to break the on south coast at Antelat as possible the importance of Antelat was seen, but no need to place it in the context of urgency and organic safety. That Ajdabiya came to be insignificant and no practical value, and because the location was not promptly reached by the troops destined to strengthen it, and because he found himself without the fundamental contribution of the forward control hub of Antelat. However, his premature abandonment, although it has aroused controversy and recriminations, we can not say-so as things turned out-that has influenced the development of the fighting on 6-7 February.

The problem that arose at the command of the army more or less resulted in a dilemma: save, to use them in the best of times, the armored troops and abandon to their fate the infantry left with no transport or try to save both? The dilemma

will arise again in the desert on both sides, however, in that circumstance it was solved in the worst way a middle ground. They tried to rescue part of the infantry without sacrificing the remaining position on a defense to the bitter end; He tried to recover what was on wheels and tracks without rigorous planning retreat. The all knowing that the troops were getting out of hand for known reasons. We give again the words to who in those days attended the events.

"In recent days the Bengasina population was afraid because it saw clearly that there was no defense and the military commanders were not taking any action was observed fact that the troops fell back in disorder (...)

The soldiers came from the front lines poorly dressed, hungry and confused because without the guidance of the officers. The comments about the common man were severe and all expressed their condemnation to the officers who abandoned their troops, they thought to place themselves in safety, with all the means of fortune.

The soldier who asked not to know where to go, where to stay, where to get the food, but no one has ever been able to tell him anything

The discipline has been affected to the point that soldiers watched the officers with indifference, even those of the other armed forces, without even hinting at a salute. Only in Misrata on the 7th began an action for recovery of disbanded soldiers with order concentration at Homs ^{“(19)”}

Also admitted to be unjust generalization, what matters is the overall impression given by the people, because inevitably reflected also negatively on the troops still in order.

At the tactical level the vanguard had to be naturally formed by the Della Bona column. If they had had specific orders and kept all the artillery; He had been directed to Ajdabiya, with the task of preventing any disruption of escape route, or, better yet, on Antelat (from Beda Fomm), which had already been signaled danger, probably things would have gone differently. Instead column not only not absolved the function of vanguard of the army corps, or to ensure the safety retrograde movement, but neither supplied it to itself. With this, the first piece was literally given to the opponent and removed it from the chessboard.

Flying over the absence of a real "mass", able to intervene in the fighting, from Benghazi in then the question arose in the rear and armored forces. Despite the establishment of the Babini brigade, the tank battalions had always been used primarily in support of the infantry or in dribs and drabs. In early February, the Army had four M 13 battalions two (the III and V) were part of the armored brigade, along with the LX light tank battalion, the last one left; one (VI) was with the army reserve and one (XXI) with the Bignami grouping. Overall it was at least more than one hundred medium tanks efficient. He gave up to mass, as in the past, preferring to assign a part of the means to groupings responsible for ensuring the protection of the exposed flank (Bignami and Villanis). The measure is open to discussion, however, the fact that with every movement of the tank battalions, obviously slower, were left behind perplexing least on the goodness of the joint forces. Moreover, that the system of broadcasts proved patently unfit to control the situation ⁽²⁰⁾, it was not appropriate to shred the entire tactical whole. So, by the way, he saw an army leader in a passenger car go personally to seek the valuable tank units.

Accepting even an initial division of the tank battalions, it was necessary to provide for and enable their timely uniting in the unfortunate event of meeting with the 7th Armored Division. To achieve this it was necessary to release the cars from rolling stock, at least from Ghemines. The traffic jam, much to transfer to logistical tactical action, a patchwork of resources and units and civilian groups, created bottling and incompatibility that is chaos. It would have been possible to break through the two dams of the 4th Brigade and *Combe force*? It seems legitimate to consider likely that that a energetic reaction guided by short reins, with a steady hand and clear ideas, he could have achieved success. The tanks, at least those who survived; artillery, at least those of small arms; some motorized units, at least those that are well controlled, would pass. The mass would still be left on the road: it was not surprising that the most reactive. In the meager ranks of the 10th Army he had made an opening *consciousness of failure*, with its inevitable consequences:

"Suddenly, at a given moment, in one of the two adversaries can be seen to occur a rapid disintegration (and sometimes, in the case of

panic, almost instantaneous) of all these social ties. A kind of strange indifference takes hold of the soldiers and removes them from their state of intoxication. There is more, in their eyes, nor hierarchy nor prestige nor discipline nor values. It is an total upheaval (...). "(21)

In Tripolitania the backlash was strong:

"Misurata uo to yesterday was invaded by troops from Cyrenaica, troops who gave a pitiful sight not only the national population but also the disordered indigenous troops, almost always unarmed, badly-dressed, hungry, aimlessly, tossed from one Command another without assistance; detected particularly also the absence of the officers. Only a few units have passed a certain order. The spectacle, then, officers are isolated and without control of units was even more disheartening (...). "(22)

Even men of the *Ariete* division, just landed, they saw the ebb of those who abandoned Cyrenaica, but they were unscratched. The 8th Bersaglieri just arrived from Naples had received Breda 37 machine guns in place of the Fiat 35; The 132nd Tank was still equipped with small light tanks, "*les plus insignifiants d'Europe*" to use the words of Fuller; the 132nd artillery had only two 75/27 groups with six kilometers of range, but their morale - high - did not fold. Well framed, well prepared, they were determined not deface it in front of the enemy or in front of comrades the *Afrikakorps*

CHAPTER V NOTES

1. Wavell to Churchill dated 17.3.1941: "(...) the result is that currently in Cyrenaica I am the weak man and that I do not arrange some reserves of absolutely indispensable armored troops (...). I cannot however afford for the moment employ my meager armored forces as audaciously as I would want (...)" (W. Churchill, op. cited, p. 235). And 20 April still wrote to Prime Minister: "(...) the perspectives for the future will still preoccupy for some time, because of my weakness in tanks, *cruisers* type tanks. You become account that the war in the desert depends in great part on the armored forces (...)" (Ibid, p. 280 - 281).
2. B. LIDDELL HART, *The tanks*, cit., p. 62.
3. E. VON RINTELEN, op. cit., p. 94.
4. ERWIN ROMMEL, *Guerra senza odio*, Garzanti, Milano 1952, p. 113.
5. One is not in possession of clear and complete data on the total losses endured from the beginning of the British offensive. An approximate calculation, based also on an internal memorandum of the General Staff of the Army dated 22 February 1941, would give a total of 140-150,000 men, 1,400 pieces of artillery of various type and caliber, 450 tanks and 4,500 trucks. According to Wavell, the British captured 130,000 prisoners, 1,290 guns, 400 tanks and huge amounts of war material. According to Playfair it was a matter of 130,000 prisoners, 845 field pieces, heavy guns and heavy field, 180 medium tanks and more than 200 light ones
6. E. FALDELLA, op. cited, p. 305.
7. See. M. MONTANARI, op. cited, pp. 230-252.
8. Ibid , pp. 258-277.
9. Gen. Gott, commander of the support group and then, from the end of 1941, the commander of the 7th armored division, had to comment very late that many tactical ideas of Hobart had been demonstrated "*solid and real*" and also that his logistical dispositions were remained almost unchanged exceeding the test of two years of war (LIDDELL HART, *The tanks* cit., p. 62).
10. HEINZ GUDERIAN, *Ricordi di un soldato*, Baldini e Castoldi, Milano 1962, p. 17.
11. I.S.O. PLAYFAIR, op. cited, p. 363.
12. In merit to the repercussion of the military events in Cyrenaica, the document more suit is constituted from a report dated 18.2.1941 envoy from Gen. Gazzola, inspector general of the Italian Africa Police (P.A.I.) in Libya, to Gen. Maraffa, general commander of the P.A.I. Corps.
13. Still before the battle of Sidi el-Barrani the police arm and the police headquarters insistently signaled the little discipline of the soldiers housed or in passage from Benghazi.
14. Closely confidential memoranda, appendix 1 to the report dated 18.2.1941 of the inspector general of the P.A.I., cited in the text.

15. Need not be strict in blaming the errors committed in the calculation of the enemy forces. Tasks that Churchill was considering that the 15th Panzer Division could have from 600 to 650 tanks and that the estimate of Wavell was of beyond 400 tanks, of which 138 of medium type, while the 15th panzer then possessed only 168 medium tanks (W. CHURCHILL, op. cited, p. 248 and p. 281).
16. LIDDELL HART, *The tanks cit.*, p.62.
17. Of the captured medium tanks, the English used five M-13 at Tobruk reserving to them a clear complementary function. Of the M -13 taken at Beda Fomm will be previewed the employment in the within the 6th tank regiment of the 3rd armored brigade, always with assignment according to, after installation of a radio.
18. W. CHURCHILL, op. cited ,p.251.
19. Report of the police headquarters of Benghazi, T.6 of prot. dated starting 12.2.1941, compiled at Tripoli.
20. Visa via the radios connections sufficient an example: to telegram MPA (absolute maximum precedence)/MM PP AA (on all the maximum top priorities) sent from Tripoli the evening of 16 February, the Command of the garrison of Gadames answered the evening of the 18th, but the answer telegram arrived only in part on the evening of the 21st. The end of the dispatch arrived at Tripoli the evening of the 22nd.
21. GASTON BOUTHOU, *La guerra, Longanesi*, Milano 1961,p.168.
22. Relationship of the police headquarters of Misurata n. 52/9 dated 9.2.1941.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE ITALIAN ARMY
ON 10 JUNE 1940

1. GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMY: Chief of the G.S.: Marshal Graziani, Rodolfo

2. ARMY GROUP WEST.S.A.R. Umberto di Savoia, Prince of Piemonte

a) 1st Army

Gen. Pintor, Pietro

-II Army Corps.	»Bertini, Francesco
<i>Forlì</i> Inf. Div.	»Perugi, Giulio
<i>Acqui</i> Inf. Div.	»Sartoris, Francesco
<i>Livorno</i> Inf. Div.	»Giada, Benvenuto
<i>Cuneense</i> Alpine Div. ..	» Ferrero, Alberto
-III Army Corps	»Arisio, Mario
<i>Ravenna</i> Inf. Div.	»Nebbia, Edoardo
<i>Cuneo</i> Inf. Div.	»Melotti, Carlo
-xv Army Corps.	» Gambara, Gastone
<i>Modena</i> Inf. Div.	»Vassarri, Alberto
<i>Cosseria</i> Inf. Div.	» Gloria, Alessandro
<i>Cremona</i> Inf. Div.	»Mondino, Umberto
-Army Reserve:	
<i>Pistoia</i> Inf. Div.	»Priore, Mario
<i>Lupi di Toscana</i> Inf. Div.	»Bollea, Ottavio
<i>Cacciatori delle Alpi</i> Inf. Div.	»Lorenzelli, Dante
<i>Pusteria</i> Alpine Div.	»De Cia, Amedeo

b) 4th Army. ...» Guzzoni, Alfredo

-Alpine Corps.	»Negri, Luigi
<i>Tridentina</i> Alpine Div. ...	» Santovito, Ugo
<i>Taurinense</i> Alpine Div. ..	.» Micheletti, Paolo
-I Army Corps...	»Vecchiarelli, Carlo
<i>Cagliari</i> Inf. Div.	»Scuero, Antonio
<i>Superga</i> Inf. Div.	»Barbasetti di Prun, Curio
<i>Pinerolo</i> Inf. Div.	»De Stefanis, Giuseppe
-IV Army Corps.	»Mercalli, Camillo
<i>Sforzesca</i> Inf. Div.	»Ollearo, Alfonso
<i>Assietta</i> Inf. Div.	»Girlando, Emanuele

-Army Reserve:

Brennero Inf. Div.

Legnano Inf. Div.

3. ARMY GROUP EAST

a) 2nd Anny

-V Army Corps.

Sassari Inf. Div

Lombardia Inf. Div.

Bergamo Inf. Div

-XI Anny Corps.

Re Inf. Div

Isonzo Inf. Div

b) 6th Anny (*Po*)

-Quick Army Corps

1st *Eugenio di Savoia* Cav. Div

2nd *Em. Filiberto* Cav. Div ..»

3rd *Amedeo d'Aosta* Cav. Div

-Armored Army Corps

Trieste. Mot. Div.

Trento Mot. Di\T.

Ariete. Ann. Div.

Littorio Ann. Div

-Truck carried Army Corps

Pasubio Auto. Div.

Piave Auto. Div.

Torino Auto. Div

c) 8th Anny (from 12 June 1940)

-XIV Anny Corps.

Marche Inf. Div

Puglie Inf. Div

-VI Anny Corps.

Messina Inf. Div

Parma Inf. Div

Casale Inf. Di\T

4. ARMY GROUP SOUTH

a) XII Anny Corps.

Aosta Inf. Div

Napoli. Inf. Div

Gen. Forgiero, Arnaldo

»Scala, Edoard

Gen. Grossi, Camillo

»Amhrosio, Vittorio

»Balocco, Riccardo

»Castagna, Giacomo

»Esposito, Giovanni

»Belletti, Pietro

»Roux, Matteo

»Fiorenzoli, Benedetto

»Romero, Federico

»Vercellino, Mario

»Messe, Gio\Tanni

»Ferrari Orsi, Federico

Pizzolato, Gavino

»Marazzani, Mario

»Dall'Ora, Fidenzio

»Ferroni, Vito

»Nuvoloni, Luigi

»Baldassarre, Ettore

»Bitossi, Gervasio

»Zingales, Francesco

»Giovannelli, Vittorio

»Roncaglia, Ercole

»Manzi, Luigi

S.A.R. Adalberto di Savoia, Duke of Bergamo

Gen. Vecchi, Giovanni

»Pentimalli, Riccardo .

»Marghinotti, Mario

»Rosi, Ezio

»Zani, Francesco

»Grattarola, Attilio

»Navarini, Enea

Mar .De Bono, Emilio

Gen. Rossi, Angelo

»D'Arle, Federico

»Coturri, Renato

- b) XIII Army Corps..
 - Sabauda* Inf. Div
 - Calabria* Inf. Div
 - c) *Supreme Commander of Albania*
 - (& XXVI Army Corps)
 - Venezia* Inf. Div .
 - Ferrara* Inf. Div .
 - Arezzo* Inf. Div
 - Julia* Alpine Div
 - Centauro* Arm. Div
 - d) 3rd Army
 - IX Army Corps.
 - Bari* Inf. Div
 - Taro* Inf. Div
 - Piemonte* Inf. Div
 - 5. -7th. ARMY (RES.)
 - VII Army Corps.
 - Firenze* Inf. Div
 - Friuli* Inf. Div
 - VIII Army Corps
 - Siena* Inf. Div
 - Granatieri di Sardegna* Inf. Div
 - 6. ITALIAN ARMY FORCES
OF THE AEGEAN ISLANDS
 - Regina* Inf. Div
 - 7. SUPREME COMMANDER CF THE
ARMY FORCES N. A.
 - a) 5th Anny
 - X Army Corps.
 - Bologna* Inf. Div
 - Savona* Inf. Div
 - Sabratha* Inf. Div
 - XX Army Corps.
 - Pavia* Inf. Div
 - Brescia* Inf. Div
 - Sirte* Inf. Div
- Gen. De Pignier, Augusto
 - »..Scanagatta, Ubaldo
 - »..Petra di Caccuri, Carlo
 - » Visconti Prasca, Sebastiano
 - » Bonini, Silvio
 - » Zannini, Ucurgo
 - » Molinari, Michele
 - » De Giorgis, Fedele
 - » Magli, Giovanni
 - » Geloso, Carlo
 - » Rossi, Camillo
 - » Zaccone, Emesto
 - » Pedrazzoli, Gino
 - » Cerio, Giovanni
 - S.A.R. Filiberto di Savoia, duca di Pistoia
 - Gen. Aymonino, Aldo
 - » Negri, Paride
 - » Sogno, Vittorio
 - » Gambelli, Remo
 - » Gabutti, Gualtiero
 - » Orlando, Taddeo
 - Gen. De Vecchi di Val Cismon
 -Cesare, Maria
 - » Piazzoni, Alessandro
 - Mar. Balbo, Italo
 - Gen. Gariboldi, Italo
 - » Barbieri, Alberto
 - » Lerici, Roberto
 - » Maggiani, Pietro
 - » Della Bona, Guido
 - » Cona Ferdinando
 - » Zaglio, Pietro
 - » Cremascoli, Giuseppe
 - » Della Mura, Vincenzo

- XXIII Army Corps.
 - 1st CC.NN Div. "*23 Marzo*" » Antonelli, Francesco
 - 2nd CC.NN Div. "*28 Ottobre*" » Argentino, Francesco
 - 2nd Libyan Div. (re serve) » Pescatori, Annando
- b) 10th Army. ...» Berti, Mario
 - XXI Army Corps. » Dalmazzo, Lorenzo
 - Marmarica* Inf. Div ..» Tracchia, Ruggero
 - Cirene* Inf. Div » Spatocco, Carlo
 - XXII Army Corps. » Pitassi Mannella, Enrico
 - Catanzaro* Inf. Div » Stefanelli, Giuseppe
 - 4th CC.NN Div "*3 Gennaio*" » Merzari, Fabio
 - 1st Libyan Div. (riserva) » Sibille, Luigi
 - c) *Saharan Detachment* » Gallina, Sebastiano
- 8. I. E. A. ARMY FORCE FORZE S.A.R. Amedeo di Savoia
 - Duke d'Aosta, Viceroy of Ethiopia
 - Granatieri di Savoia* Inf. Div Gen. Liberati, Amedeo
 - Africa* Inf. Div » Varda, Giovanni
 - Detachment North » Frusci, Luigi
 - Detachment South » Gazzera, Pietro
 - Detachment East » Nasi, Guglielmo
 - Detachment Giuba . » Pesenti, Gustavo

APPENDIX 2

GRAND UNITS MOBILIZED
THE SITUATION ON 10 JUNE 1940

ARMY GROUPS	ARMIES	COMMANDS OF ARMY CORPS					INFANTRY	D	I	V	I	S	I	O	N	S	MILITA	LIBIAN
		NORMAL	ALPINE	SEMI-MOT	ARMORED	QUICK												
Ovest	1*	I	Alp.	At.	Cr.	CL	Acqui	Lombardia	Cuneense	Pasubio	Bologna	Trento	Ariete	E.F.I.F. (1)	56ennale	1° Libica		
Est	2*	II					Aosta	Lupatiscana	Julia	Piave	Brescia	Trieste	Centaurio	Eugenio Sav	23 Marzo	2° Libica		
Sud	3*	III					Arezzo	Marche	Pusteria	Torino	Catanzaro		Littorio	P.A.D.A. (2)	28 Ottobre			
	4*	IV					Assietta	Messina	Faurinense		Cirene							
	5*	V					Bari	Modena	Tridentina		Marmarica							
	Po (6*)	VI					Bergamo	Napoli			Pavia							
	7*	VII					Brennero	Parma			Sabratha							
	8*	VIII					Cacciatori	Piemonte			Savona							
	10*	IX					Cagliari	Pinerolo			Sirte							
		X					Calabria	Pistoia										
		XI					Casale	Puglie										
		XII					Cosseria	Ravenna										
		XIII					Cremona	Re										
		XIV					Cuneo	Regina										
		XV					Ferrara	Sabauda										
		XX					Firenze	Sassari										
		XXI					Forlì	Sforzesca										
		XXII					Friuli	Siena										
		XXIII					Gran Sassi	Superga										
		XXVI					Isonzo	Taro										
							Legnano	Venezia										
							Livorno											

(1) Emanuele Filiberto Testa di Ferro
(2) Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta

Note: There were also 2 national divisions in Italian East Africa "Granatieri di Savoia" & "Africa"

A SHORT GEOGRAPHIC NOTE ON LIBYA (1)

BORDERS

The territory of Libya is bordered by Tunisia and Algeria to the west, Egypt to the east and Western Africa and Equatorial French to the south.

Regarding Tunisia, to Algeria and the French colonies of Western and Equatorial Africa, the border line, at the beginning of second world war, leaving from Ras Agadir with general directorate office the south-west, left in Libyan territory the oases of Nalut and Gadames; then it folded to south, passing between the oasis of Gianet (France) and that one of Gat (Italy), in order to direct towards south-east until reaches Tummo (B. el Uaar) (Italy). It continued here in the south-east direction, through the massive mountains of the Tibesti and plain of Taleha (between Tibesti and the plateau of Erdi) in order to reach the frontier the west of the Sudan Anglo-Egyptian, at the intersection of the 24° east meridian Greewich with 18°, 45' of latitude north, leaving in Italian territory the localities of Ozu and Ghezenti, and in French territory those of Bardai and of Tekro.

Regarding the Egyptian border line departs from the coast between Bardia and Sollum followed about the 25° and to meridian of east longitude Greewich, until the 20° parallel, leaving the oasis of Giarabub to Italy and that one of Siwa to Egypt; from the 20° parallel in then, followed the 24° meridian ending at 18° 45' of latitude north.

Within the aforesaid limits, Libya comprises the following regions:

- *Tripolitania* properly said: it corresponds to the immense and fertile coastal plain between the Small and Grande Sirte and embraces also the stratus of the plateau that closes it to the south;
- *Sirtica*: steppe region, barren and burnt from the sun that shows oneself to the sea on the gulf of Grande Sirte;
- *Cyrenaica* properly said: it corresponds to the elevated limestone peninsula of the Barca that forms the eastern margin of Grande Sirte;
- *Marmarica*: continuation, to eastward, of the Cyrenaica plateau that, to leave from the gulf of Bomba and until that of Sollum, becomes more and more regular and much less elevated;

(1) From USE, *In Africa settentrionale. La preparazione al conflitto. L'avanzata su Sidi El Barrani*. Rome, 1955, pp. 9-20.

- *Fezzan*: it corresponds to the western part of the plateaus that extend behind the strip of that name coastal regions over; it constitutes the hinterland of the Tripolitania and good part of the Sirtica;
- the *Libyan desert*: corresponds to the eastern part of the plateaus zone and it extends, beyond the border, until to the great valley of the Nile; it constitutes the remaining hinterland of part of Sirtica, Cyrenaica and Marmarica.

GENERAL MORPHOLOGIC CHARACTERS

The Libyan territory is an immense border of marginal strip of the continent African. The shape of the reliefs, understandably tabular, is from attribute, beyond that to the prevalence of vertical pushes in the movements that originated them, also to the special pattern to which these regions they were and is still subject. In fact, where the rains are rare and lack nearly completely superficial running waters, the only agent of the pattern is the atmosphere; it operates physically, with the sudden bounces of temperature that crushes the most resistant cliffs also; mechanically, with the wind that sweeps via the detritus.

To this fact the desert morphology is connected: there are high desert, full of rocks and pebbly, called *hamada* (plateaus) in which the strong thermal excursions they disintegrate the cliff in tiny fragments that are removed from the twenty; called others *edejen* are instead sandy and therefore covered by mobile dunes and they are found generally in the regions depressed surrounding to the *hamada*; others, finally, called *serir*, can be considered intermediate to the previous shapes and are characterized from a enough hard ground covered of small gravel and pebbles. In *serir* the movement he is the most easiest that not in the two first kinds. In it the use of motor vehicles is possible.

One characteristic morphologic of the region is represented from the *Wadis* (the singular *Wadi*) that every so often they furrow: it arranges, desiccated and dead, of the great valleys originated from the water-drainage of waters in the ancient fluvial period.

Such period had to probably be short and with rains much intense in the region and that it does not explain the insufficient development of the Libyan fluvial morphology.

The waters of pour into the sea only in strip more northerner; the greater part of they overthrew instead in river basins constituted from the zones depressed of the boarding, accruing there great heaps of mobile material that concurred to form the *serir* and originating temporary lakes insides that evaporates to arrive with the dryness and deposited the salts of which waters they had become rich washing cliffs: such it seems the origin of the salt warehouses, you attend in the inner depressions, and of brackish nearly the all the waters and of the pools.

To the water circulation subterranean finally the "oases", constituted by depressed locality are connected in which waters or they emerge naturally with sources or they are accessible by means of pools. The vegetation that spontaneously shape, that cultivated and various shrewdness, protect these zones of sands.

The oases are important as centers of life in means to the desert and constitute therefore, along the communication lines, the points of obliged passage and of pause for who must cover the region.

The COASTAL REGIONS

Are the most important of all Libya, are under the economic aspect, for their more immediate possibilities than valorization, it is from the military side, since they show oneself to the Mediterranean and they constitute therefore premised base and to whichever penetration in the interior.

I. TRIPOLITANIA. The plateau that constitutes the skeleton is formed in prevalence from boarding of limekilns secondary (cretaceous).

They are distinguished by:

a) The *Gefara*, wide lowland that extends, with light undulation, from the coast of the Mediterranean to the foot of the *Gebel*; it is constituted from lands of overlapped fluvial transport and Aeolic to the full of rocks boarding, here and there emerging, that it constitutes the base.

It accumulates Aeolic, extended along the shoreline (mostly beach dunes), arrest to the outflow of waters to the sea, giving place in the season of rains to coastal ponds (*sebche*), sometimes brackish for marine infiltrations (*mellahe*).

The coastal strip, rich dunes of humidity, are interspaced of numerous oases, while to the inside the land, apparently barren (*sahel*) is susceptible of cultivations by artificial irrigation. Another less extended oases more or rise here and here in the *Gefara* in some sections of the bed of the *Wadis* or where water-bearing stratum (existing in subsoil of all the *Gefara* for the presence of put in impermeable argillaceous layers to the limekilns) and in the vicinity of the *sebche* and the *mellahe* emerge.

The coast, in correspondence of the *Gefara*, is constituted from a limestone-sandstone park, in horizontal layers, joined and of difficult landing place, also for the frequent rocks and sandbanks.

The marine invasions and regressions, verification in the past ages have provoked, with to the secular abandonment, the burial of the few existing natural ports, like as an example Leptis Magna and Sabratha.

The port of Tripoli was, with huge and expensive works, arranged and adapted to the modern traffic; the other smaller landings place instead are not adapted to the great steamboats and introduce, especially in adverse times, difficult conditions of access (Zuara, Homs, Zliten, Misurata)

b) The *Gebel* (in Arab = the mounts) immense sloping tabular plateau constituted from less waved lands more or that towards south-east and the south-west.

In the depositor north it is introduced AS a true and own mountain chain, much deeply recorded jagged and from gorges and ravines, that it falls steep on the *Gefara*, with a characteristic front having the shape of a great arc with the concavity to north.

The line watershed of the *Gebel* runs nearly along the crest of the escarpment that shows oneself to the plain.

In the winter season the superficial waters slide in the watershed (*Wadis*) that they furrow the northern stratus of the *Gebel* with general course south-north but, before arriving to the plain, come completely absorbed from the land of mostly limestone nature.

The Zone is in the complex knot and full of rocks, difficult to cover. Immediately to south of the escarpment of the *Gebel* and parallel to it, a land strip (terrace of the *Gebel*) deep from 20 to 30 km. covered in great part of vegetation runs, that it is the part more productive than all the plateau and the only stabile inhabited (Nalut-Giado-Jefren-Garian).

The *Gebel* extends altogether (from the west to east) for approximately 400 km., to a variable distance from the coast gives beyond 100 km. in the Gebel Nefusa to approximately 20 in the Gebel Tarhuna; near the confines of the Tunisian border (Nalut) it has an altitude of approximately 600 m. and Overhangs of approximately 300 m. the *Gefara*, with the name of Gebel Nefusa and Gebel Jefren; it continues with the name of Gebel Garian to south of Tripoli, reaching Its maximum altitude (Tigrinna, m. 837), for thereafter it drops and as it approaches to the coast with the Gebel Tarhuna, and to follow finally the same coast from Homs to Misurata.

c) The *Ghibla* (region of the south), southern depositor of the *Gebel*; an immense plateau undulated, sometimes deeply recorded from erosions that confer it an much enlivened aspect.

It is pre-desert, barren zone of summer, but green of pastures in the rainy season; in the immense ones wadis small oases of palms and some sink exist.

The *Ghibla* slopes sweetly to the south (from 800 to 450 m.) on the pressure of di Mizda, marked by *Wadis* and ponds brackish (*mellahe*), that they separate it from the Hamada el-Hamra, the vast Libyan Hamada (altitude approximately 800 m.), from which the sour and stony desert begins.

2. SIRTICA. It is introduced as a low region, mostly flat, in which it furrows and relief, of essentially erosive origin and of accumulate, much modest and they are *decided* messily.

The western part of the region is bordered, to south, from a plateau Zone (margins of the Gebel es Soda, Gebel Uaddan, Gebel Bu Hosa) and is furrowed from Wadis that they come down, in sense roughly meridian; that eastward falls on the Libyan desert and introduces

Wadis with equatorial direction (Wadi el-Faregh and, in the southern zone, Marada *Wadi*).

Proceeding from the coast towards the inside the following zones can in the region be distinguished:

- a) Northern zone constituted from successive parallel bands with own characteristics:
 - a coastal strip sandy more or less mobile, alternating from some *sebcha* (the western part is the most swampiest than that eastern and while in this the drinkable waters abound, in the first scarcity);
 - a strip of *sebche* rear to front, in which the *sebche* they are allowed nearly uninterruptedly, with the exception of drawn comprised between Buerat el-Hsun (where the large *sebcha* of Tauorga has term) and es-Sultan. Remarkable in the eastern Sirtica the great salt swamp named Mugtaa el Chebira (of sulfur) in which flows the *Wadi* el Faregh;
 - a band of most modest importance, more or less it continues, alternating from lowlands with vegetation and bushes. Such band in the western Sirtica goes always mainly increasing from north to south until confused with the layers of the Gebel es - Soda, Gebel Uaddan, Gebel Bu Hosa, while, in the eastern Sirtica, it is continuation from a level zone, true sub-desert steppe, that extends until the *Wadi* el Faregh. It is this immense and a long watershed that it has origin in the pre-desert Marmarico (and - Deffa) and runs towards the west taking the successive *Wadi* named el-Hamin, el-Arad, el-Melah, el-Faregh; it introduces a few emphasized lines, it does not have escarpments, and in the last section completely it is opened on the adjacent plan. Numerous pools are spaced out along its course, especially in the central section that is zone of dwelling of many aboriginal groups.
- b) intermediate Zone: being in the eastern Sirtica and only introduces the superficial aspect of level plain, whose uniformity is broken off from groups of modest relief; it is a knot and bleak zone, deprived of water and it does not offer possible living conditions, is limited to south from the zone of the oases.
- c) southern Zone or of the oases, than extends mostly to the 29° north parallel. It is characterized from groups of oasis (Socna, Zella, Abu Naim, Marada) that loosen also in Cyrenaica and Marmarica, and pushes end beyond the Egyptian border (Augila, Gialo, Giarabub, Siwa). Remarkable in this zone the Marada *Wadi*, immense lowland in which a rich water-bearing stratum, emerging in some points, feeds a disseminated vegetation of palms.

3. CYRENAICA. Massive limestone peninsula of the width of approximately 300 km. The *Gebel* Achdar forms the skeleton and it extends, lightly

arched, for approximately 250 km. from the zone of Benghazi to the gulf of Bomba; it has one depth of approximately 50 km. and reached in the near the marabout of Sidi the Mohamed el-Homri (northeast of Slonta) the maximum altitude of 880 meters.

The plateau, whose line watershed is carried out almost concentric to the coastal arc, declines, towards south with slopping cake, in the zone of es-Siruàl, characterized from the phenomenon of the winter flooding and comprised in the immense pre-desert steppe; it comes down very steep to the west and north, where shape three clean steps of some hundred of meters of height, enclosing two intermediate terraces.

The relief deeply is recorded from gorges, coves, characteristic sinkhole of the karstic limestone, and is covered from good vegetation (Mediterranean cultivations, spots, forests); here its name of *Gebel Achdar* (green mountain).

The vegetative value of the land is given from the dense red earth layer that cover the cliff and from rains and sufficient dews to supply the humidity.

The coast is formed from a sandy, wide selva near Benghazi several thin kilometers and that hand goes man towards east north, where the full of rocks mass of the plateau falls directly at times into the sea.

The convex total uniformity and course board of the depositor do not offer a sufficient jagged and the few coves have been overwhelmed from the Mediterranean selva: everywhere sandbanks and cliffs to flower of water render the land difficult.

The main improved ports are Benghazi, Tolmeta and Marsa Susa.

4. MARMARICA. It is the continuation, to east, with the name of Gebel Acaba, of the limestone plateau of the Cyrenaica. The Gebel Acaba has a medium altitude of a hundred of meters, is stepped, in the greater part squalid and of inferior logistic value to that one of analogous plain in the Cyrenaica. As this slopes sweetly towards south and finishes with a step, along the Faregh-Giarabub-Siwa line, on the deep Sirtica depression and the Libyan desert.

To east, the Marmarica a plain extends, sensitive differences of character and altitude, until towards Marsa Matruh. It, for the precipitous rises of the escarpment that surpasses the gulf of Sollum, opposes a relative obstacle to exceed who comes from along east the coast.

To the North it reaches until the sea or much next one to it; here the best conditions that the coast offers to the richness in ports. Of particular importance the three coves of Bomba are introduced, of Tobruk and Sollum. Better than all it is the intermediate cove of Tobruk, opened towards east and repaired from a peninsula full of rocks that falls steep on the sea and circumscribes a long river basin approximately 4 km. and wide 1.6 with a depth of beyond 12 meters.

THE INNER REGIONS

1. FEZZAN. It can be considered as the region of transition between Mediterranean Africa and the Sahara, of which geographically a part.

It is an immense plateau from the limits in more uncertain places, but that it can be thought comprised between the alignment Hamada el Hamra-Gebel es Soda-el Harug el Abiad, and that one of massive the crystalline ones of the Tassili- Tibesti. In it several the types of desert landscape are alternated in terrain, here and there, from numerous and immense oases around to which the life of the immense zone is grouped. The main series of these oases rise in the three large ones furrow that, crossing the region nearly in the sense of the parallels, they characterize it. They are these, proceeding from north to south, following: *Wadi* esc Sciati (oasis of Brach, Sebba, etc), *Wadi* el-Agial (oasis el-Abiad, el-Hatia, Ubari, etc), Bergiug *Wadi* (Traghen oasis, Murzuch, etc).

Beyond to the series pointed out other oases exist in the Fezzan, of primary importance; of these, main following: Gadames, Gat, Zuila, Tmessa, el Fugha, etc.

2. LIBYAN DESERT. It is the immense plain delimited one to north from the line of the Cyrenaica pre-desert oases (Marada-Gialo-Augila-Giarabub-Siwa); to east, from the series of the oases immediately before Egyptians to the valley of the Nile; to south from the mountainous barrier of the Darfur- Tibesti; to the west from the region of the Fezzan.

The surface of this flat, powerful worked from the erosion, is in great part a *serir*, covered in the immense Southeastern part from an extended one of sands of accumulates Aeolic: the large *ergh* Libyan, constituted longest dunes, arranged all in the same sense and of variable height from little meters end beyond 100 on the level of the *serir*.

They break the uniformity of this desert (largest and desolated than all Africa) the two zones depressed of the oases of Zighen and Cufra and the granite masses of Archenu, el-Auenat and Gebel Chissu if rise beyond the 1500 m. to south-east of Cufra.

3. TIBESTI. It makes part of the alignment of massive crystalline constituent the northern hem of the great archaic Saharan continent.

It is a massive immense triangular one of approximately 500 km. of side, constituted from a central nucleus, from which they leave, in direction east north, south-east and the west three great distributions that touch altitudes on the 2500-3000 meters.

CLIMATE, HYDROGRAPHIC, VEGETATION and CULTIVATIONS

The climate of the North Africa is understandably sub-tropical, with prevalence of twenty relatively cool and humid ones of the Mediterranean in the summer, and of west winter.

To Tripoli and Benghazi the averages of the temperature oscillate from the 13° in January to 27° in July and August; in the entire year they are gone around on the 20°. The every day excursion is constantly of only 7° to the maximum, but, as is proceeded towards the inside is had at first medium nearly equal, with gradually increasing excursions; therefore they increase also the averages same, and, remarkably, the excursions, yes that on the *hamada* every day jolts of 30° are had and more. At Murzuch the middle of August is of 36°.

The *rains*, capacities especially from the twenty of placing, are exclusively winter, and almost limited to the coastal region: to Tripoli and Benghazi they fall from 400 to 500 millimeters of water to the year. With proceeding towards south, after the first heights, the rains go diminishing, in order to become rarest in the inside where they are taken place in average every five, six years.

Between the twenty it is troublesome peculiarly the *ghibli*, than coil from the desert towards the coast for constituted of one barometric depression in the Mediterranean; a very violent one, transports minute dust and is cause of diseases to the eyes; it makes to elevate the temperature to beyond 45° to the shadow and produces to strong evaporation and drought.

In conclusion, it cannot be said that the climatic conditions are bad in the coastal cities; they do not introduce themselves but sure like much favorable to the military operations in the inside; the drought, the little portability and sparsely of the water, the strong diurnal heats, the nocturnal colds, is causes of easy internal diseases; the contagious, endemic malaria in some localities and diseases in the aboriginal Population, allow to constitute a difficult climatic atmosphere that it demands providing a opportune of logistic character.

The limestone extension and, the climatic regimen nature *hamada* great of the desert sands that and steppe like, provoke nearly the absolute lack of superficial water and water course, in kind.

In *wadis* the water it slides to the single surface during rains: they have but generally little deep a sub-alveolar course, where the water can be caught up with pools, or emerge spontaneously in the depressions.

In the *Gefara* tripolina the pyretic stratum veil is not limited to the *wadis*, but argillaceous layer is disseminated on all I that gives the foot of the Gebel comes down to the sea; its depth is minimal on the coast and goes more increasing to 12-15 m. and also in the inside.

In Cyrenaica verification the characteristic circulation caustic basement of waters: with over works, they disappear in the subsoil, to reappear then along the terraces and in the coastal selvage. The sources are numerous (are estimated to beyond 300) and someone of discreet ability, however the existence of several great artificial tanks (or their ruins) and the rests of fluvial obstructions for the collection of rain waters (draft in kind of constructions Roman) are to demonstrate that they never have not been sufficient for the needs of agriculture.

As far as vegetation and cultivations, the lands of Libya can be distinguished in:

- desert lands (of the three species already mentioned) deprive nearly of vegetation (or);
- steppes lands in which the vegetation (mostly spontaneous) are limited to the season of rains: they are diffuse in all the coastal region of the Tripolitania, the Sirtica, and the Barca, and arrive especially taken advantage of for the pasture; in some locality it is cultivated and share;
- lands vegetables (humid, coarse red earth, etc), in which the constant water availability basement a allows intense cultivation , that, in grace of the natural fertility of the ground and the elevated temperature, is very exuberant and profitable; these lands scattered in the coastal region and the inner depressions comprise: the oases and the *suani*, to cultivations mostly well irrigated (palm groves, citrus, orchards, vegetables) and the *ginàn*, to mostly dry cultivations (olive trees, cereals). To the forests and the spots dense, characteristic of the Mediterranean flora join to you, than they are found in Cyrenaica.

COMMUNICATIONS

The true roads and only practicable for motor vehicles are in Libya limited to the coastal zone and they are penetrated towards the inside, in kind, only until area around some main center. In the remaining zone of the immense territory the communications are represented from automotive tracks and the so-called caravans. These, subject to appear and to disappear under the action of the twenty, directly carry out along combining lines the single oases.

They are numbered among the roads open to truck traffic:

- the great coastal road - 1822 km. long - that from the Tunisian border (with a doubling in the southern gebelica way, from Barce to Lamluda) reach Port Bardia on the Egyptian border (Ft. Capuzzo);

- some internal roads that make head to the main coastal localities. In particular:

in Tripolitania: the Zuara-Nalut-Gadames; Tripoli-Mizda-Brach, with distributions from el-Azizia and Garian for Nalut; Tripoli-Benilid; the Homs-Tarhuna; Misurata-Beni Ulid; Misurata-Bu Ngem (that it continues for Socna until Gat with distributions for Zella and Murzuch);

in Cyrenaica: the road open to truck traffic Benghazi-el Mechili-Derna; ez the Zuetina-el Mechili-Tmimi along the southern escarpment of the plateau of Barca, with distributions from el Mechili for Tobruk, Capuzzo, Berta, Cirene and Slonta; the Agedabia-Gialo; the Tobruk-Giarabub.

The main automotive tracks and to caravan routes find in continuation of the roads road opens to truck traffic. They are remembered:

- the tracks and caravan routes of the Tripolitania and the Fezzan: Gadames-Gat, whence to the basin of the Niger and the lake Ciad; Mizda-el Hasi, whence to Gat and Murzuch and from this last locality, for the oases of el-Gatrum and Tegerhi, through the Tummo mounts, to lake Ciad and the Borcu;
- the tracks of the Sirtica, that they put in communication the coast (Tmed Hassan, Sirte, en-Nofilia, el-Agheila) with the inner oases and these between of they and with those of the Cyrenaica, and the Libyan desert: Bu Ngem, Socna, Zella, Marada, Augila-Gialo;
- the tracks and caravan routes of the Cyrenaica that gives the Zuetina-Derna road open to truck traffic carry here to the oases of Augila-Gialo and to those of Giarabub-Siwa;
- the tracks and caravan routes of the Libyan desert that gives Zella, Marada, Augila, Gialo carry to the oases of el-Uabria and Cufra, from where to the Borcu and the Ciad.

They cover, naturally, particular importance those that, crossing the entire desert, they connect the inner centers of the Niger, Ciad and Borcu with the Mediterranean coast; to this purpose, it is not without interest to state like, for such connection, is just Libya that one between all the regions of the North Africa that short distance offers to the lines and with more frequent oases.

The railroads, in the period which the present monograph refers, arrive, in Tripolitania, a development of approximately 200 km. and they comprised following the log: Tripoli-Zuara (km. 118); Tripoli - Tagiura with distribution for Ain-Zara (approximately km. 30); Tripoli-el Azizia (km. 50); was in plan that one el Azizia-Garian (33 km.).

In Cyrenaica, the only railway line existing connected Benghazi, for er Regima to el Abiar, to Barce, with a total distance of 108 km. (was in plan the progress from Barce towards the coast for Cirene and Derna); from Benghazi a log lead to Soluch. A Decauville railway existed moreover that for the ez-Zuetina bridges it carried to Agedabia.

POPULATION

It is characterized from the co-existence of several races, more or less mixed between them.

In particular:

- Libyan or Berberi, in majority agriculturists, inhabitants in maximum part the western Tripolitania, and especially the Gebel Nefusa and Gebel Jefren; if some of them find also in the oases of Augila, Gialo and Cufra; they are distinguished from the Arabs, beyond that for somatic characters, also for whom they have conserved of their ancient customs and of

their original language, and since follower of the said schismatic religious schism "ibadita";

- Arabic, descendants from the tribes who in century XI fixed in Africa of the North; for the more part nomadic or semi-nomadic, they live habitually in the Ghibla, the eastern Tripolitania, the Sirte in the Cyrenaica and the oases of the interior;

- Arab-Libyan, in great part agriculturists or semi-nomads, lives in the Gefara, the Msellata, the Misuratino, the Cyrenaica.

To these main groups they are added to those minors of immigration (black persons, European and Israelites), inhabitants, for more, in the central and the coastal oases.

Altogether the Libyan population on the 30 June of 1939 amounted to approximately 918,000 inhabitants of which 770,000 Muslims, 30,000 Israelites and 118,000 Christians (residents and foreign).

Effective force in Libya on 1 June 1940

Appendix 4

Entity		Personnel		Pack animals		Weapons		Motor vehicles (Various)		Bicycles		
Officers	N.C.O.s	Troops	Total			Rifles & Muskets	Machine guns	Artillery pieces	Mortars	Tanks (Fast)	Pistol	
		National	Colonial Libyans									
a.	Comando Sup. Armed Forces North Africa	83	23	20	7	133	—	—	—	—	—	—
b.	5th Army Command and its elements	121	65	1,203	—	1,389	—	—	—	—	759	201
	10th Army Command and its elements	20	23	143	—	186	—	—	—	—	109	21
	X Army Corp	827	674	10,654	—	12,155	24	15,605	480	259	3,300	552
	XX Army Corp ¹	2,480	2,436	49,157	—	54,073	86	51,632	1,378	1,293	6,711	2,851
	XXI Army Corp	1,568	1,304	26,903	—	29,775	46	31,773	513	1,173	3,853	1,577
	XXII Army Corp	686	713	12,202	—	13,601	23	13,286	368	366	122	6
	XXIII Army Corp	610	649	11,642	—	12,901	22	13,458	368	274	132	7
	TOTAL Metropolitan Forces	6,312	5,864	111,904	—	124,080	201	127,916	3,115	3,389	1,343	534
c.	R. Corps Libyan Troops	227	224	617	5,787	6,855	871	6,815	208	156	28	—
	1st Libyan Division ²	493	523	967	13,625	15,608	2,826	13,528	473	308	64	5
	2nd Libyan Division	174	272	644	4,942	6,032	1,435	7,824	—	375	6	—
	Troops of the Libyan Sahara ³	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	TOTAL Force Libyan Troops	894	1,019	2,228	24,354	28,495	5,132	28,167	681	839	98	5
d.	Carabinieri Reali ⁴	50	294	471	1,505	2,320	1,739	3,106	—	78	—	—
	R. Guardia finanza	7	83	167	83	340	31	348	—	—	3250	—
	R. Marina of Libya	184	683	4,394	103	5,364	6	3,805	—	238	158	—
	R. Aeronautica	225	457	1,797	835	3,314	5	4,514	—	40	4	—
	Western Libya	145	357	1,719	410	2,631	2	3,240	—	48	6	—
	Eastern Libya	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	M. V. S. N. (in s.p.e.) ⁵	46	48	154	90	338	40	3,200	—	—	—	—
	Italian African Police	10	45	86	35	176	5	153	—	—	—	—
	TOTAL Force other arms	667	1,967	8,788	3,061	14,483	1,828	18,366	—	404	168	—
e.	GRAND TOTAL	7,956	8,873	122,940	27,422	167,191	7,161	174,449	3,796	4,632	1,609	539 ⁶

1 In the strength of XX corps they were not included the 2 Labor Battalions. (VIII and IX) arrived on May 24, 2,362 men.

2 Included in the strength of Libyan troops non divisional units

3 In the "machine guns" are also included machine guns in the distribution to the troops of the Libyan Sahara

* M.S.V.N = Voluntary Militia & in s.p.e = per manente effective service

4 Excluding the strength of the Royal Carabinieri company of Hon and the Lieutenantcy of Cufra because already included in the Libyan Sahara

5 Of which 456 assault mortars and 83 of 81 mm.

6 Included in this figure 8 Spa 25/c 10 tanks & 7 armored cars.

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5 Of which 456 assault mortars and 83 of 81 mm.

6 Included in this figure 8 Spa 25/c 10 tanks & 7 armored cars.

EFFECTIVE FORCES IN LIBYA ON 10 JUNE 1940

	<u>National</u>	<u>Libyans</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>WESTERN FRONTIER</u> 5th Army Command	1,389		1,389
XX Army Corps { <i>Pavia</i> Inf. Div. 61st <i>Sirte</i> Inf. Div. Brescia Inf. Div.	56,435		56,435
X Army Corps { . <i>Savona</i> Inf. Div. Bologna Inf. Div. 60th <i>Sabratha</i> Inf. Div.	12,155		12,155
XXIII Army Corps. { 1st CC. .NN Div. 2nd CC. NN. Div.	12,901		12,901
non-divisional Libya R.C.T. and Libyan troops		5,807	5,807
Disembarked in Tripolitania after 1 June 1940	39,184		39,184
<i>TOTAL Western Frontier</i>	122,901	5,807	127,871
<u>EASTERN FRONTIER</u> 10th Army Command	186		186
XXI Army Corps. { 63rd <i>Cirene</i> Inf. Div. 62nd <i>Marmarica</i> Inf. Div.	29,775		29,775
XXII Army Corps. { 64th <i>Catanzaro</i> Inf. Div. 4th CC. NN. Div.	13,601		13,601
1st Libyan Division		5,856	5,856
2nd Libyan Division		5,800	5,800
Non-divisional Libyans troops		5,000	5,000
Disembarked in Cyrenaica after 1 June 1940	27,409		27,409
<i>TOTAL Eastern Frontier</i>	70,971	16,656	87,627
Libyan Sahara		6,032	6,032
<i>TOTAL general</i>	193,035	28,495	221,530(1)
1) To which must add 14,483 men made up of the special forces (Marine Air Force, CC RR, P.A.I, Financial police and M.V.S.N.)			

APPENDIX 6
ARTILLERIES EXISTING IN LIBYA
on 10 June 1940

TYPE OF WEAPON	QUANTITY			UNFOC
	Distribution	Magazine	Total	
<i>Antiaircraft</i>				
76/40 A.A. Gun	12	-	12	8.2
76/45 A.A. Gun	8	-	8	11.9
75/27 C.K. Gun	24	3	27	12.3
20 mm. Gun	206	3	209	7.6
<i>Total</i>	250	6	256	-
<i>Small-caliber</i>				
47 mm. Gun	126	1	127	2.0
65/17 Gun	124	22	146	5.9
75/27 Gun -Mk. 906	154	61	215	5.9
75/27 GunMk. 911	48	-	48	11.3
75/27 Gun	228	8	236	8.1
77/28 Gun	177	159	336	4.6
100/17 Howitzer	156	16	172	9.2
<i>Total</i>	1,013	267	1,280	-
<i>Medium-caliber</i>				
105/28 Gun	82	15	97	8.8
120/25 Gun	12	36	48	3.7
149/12 Howitzer	8	29	37	6.7
149/35 Gun	60	30	90	9.0
210/8 Mortar	2	1	3	4.0
<i>Total</i>	164	111	275	-
GRAND TOTAL	1,427	384	1,811	-

AIRCRAFT EXISTING IN LIBYA

ON 10 JUNE 1940 (1)

SPECIALTY		Serviceable for war use	Serviceable for training	Unserviceable
<i>a) Bombers</i>				
10th Stormo B. T.	S.79	30	-	1
(2)	{ S. 81	9	23	11
14th Stormo B. T.	{ Br. 20	-	1	-
	{ S. 79	12	-	-
(2)	{ S. 81	8	8	5
15th Stormo B. T.	{ Br.	-	-	3
20	{ S. 79	35	-	2
33rd Stormo B. T.	S.79	31	-	-
<i>b) Fighters</i>				
2nd Stormo C. T	{ Cr.	36	-	24
32	{	25	-	-
Cr.42				
10th Gruppo C T		27	-	-
Cr.42				
65	{ Ba.	11	-	57
50th Stormo Ass.	{	-	3	14
Ro.41	{ Ca.	23	-	-
310				
<i>c) Colonial garrison:</i>				
I gruppo A.P .C. at Ghibli & av. Saharan		18	5	9
II gruppo A.P .C. various types; battagl. Saharan		21	4	2
<i>d) Aerial Reconnaissance:</i>				
64th Aerial Recon Gruppo	{ Ro	8	-	1
37 bis	{	-	5	-
	{ Ro 1 bis			
73rd Aerial Recon Gruppo	{ Ro	6	-	2
37 bis	{	-	1	-
1 bis	{ Ro			
143rd Squadr, Marine Recon		6	-	-

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Cantr. Z 501			
e) <i>Various aircraft under repair besides the central workshop</i>			
<i>at Tripoli & at Benghazi</i>	-	7	48
TOTAL	306	57	179
<p><i>Fuel for aircrafts:</i> benzene and mixtures of varied types 87,679 quintals (i.e. 100 kilograms), sufficient for approximately 200 hours of flight for every aircraft in force to the units of the Air Force of Libya l (1) From the situation on date 1 June 1940 compiled for Mussolini by the Intendenza N.A., completed with data of G. Santoro, <i>op. cited</i>, page 2662 (2) for substitution with S 79</p>			

AIR MARSHAL
SUPREME COMMANDER ARMED FORCES N. A.

N. 01/200.741

Tripoli, 11 May 1940 - XVIII

Duce!

Yesterday you told me and this morning have confirmed to me, that for the end of the current month I must be ready in Libya with the minimum indispensable in order to begin a campaign, asserting that the Ministry War within the current May would have sent me 80 thousand men, the arms, the ammunitions and the provisions in order to reach 6 months autonomy.

General Soddu has asked me to give him at once the list of materials thought as necessary in the most absolute way; and I send a copy of it in this letter, direct to You, since I am not informed, that what is necessary to defend Libya, with probability of countering, enemy attack on two fronts.

In the recent memorandum from the Chief of the G.S. stated that, with the increase of 80 thousand men, the proportion among troops under my orders and that of the adversaries, will be of one to two. I could answer that it will be at least of one to three, but the thing has little importance: it is not the number of the enemies who preoccupy to me, but our armament. Today the best legions of Cesar, would succumb before one section of machine-guns. Allow me to say therefore that with major units supplied with limited and the oldest artillery, lacking or nearly in anti-aircraft and anti-tank, I absolutely have need of being able to count on the obstructions for the two ways of access to the Tripolitania, on the town-walls of Tripoli and those of Tobruk and Bardia.

To have of the fortified works and leave undefended for arms is an absurdity. My first request all concerns therefore on the necessity to put in efficiency these fortifications, that they represent the first modest plan still incomplete.

Another necessity which it is necessary to adequately supply and very soon is represented by the air defense.

The means that we have are absolutely insufficient and in number and quality.

Plans do not lack, but there are not the batteries and the relative organizations (networks of sight, connections, etc).

The objectives to defend are few, but exactly for this their importance is large.

How much I ask, represents, therefore, the indispensable minimum for giving a sure efficiency to the defense of the more sensitive points of our military organization.

I do not stop myself to comment the demands for men, automobiles, fuels and ammunitions: it would be useless to send another thousand men if then we could not supply them the indispensable means in order to move and to fight.

For the provisions I only allow myself of make you current once again the necessity that the supplies for the six months are complete, for that the limited local resources will be reduced still with the state of war and since the R. Marina does not assure traffic between the Fourth Shore and the Motherland.

As far as the exodus of the colonial families, leaders and of the colonization agency have allowed me to observe that in order not to damage the production of the companies, it will be better, at first, to limit the exodus to children and boys not necessary for labor.

I have already given to the fascist federations instructions for arrangements.

The shipment to the motherland could therefore be carried out with the same steamboats that will carry the 80,000 men for the major units.

Duce, permit me finally of the prerogative of wanting to supervise since the program that you same have outlined and that it is not subject to reduction, integrally is applied in order to put the Libya in a position of acquitting its function in the great picture of the new European war.

Air Marshal
BALBO

MINISTRY OF WAR
CABINET

Rome, 13 May 1940 XVIII

MEMORANDUM FOR IL DUCE
MATERIALS DEMANDED FOR N. A.

Ecc Mar. Balbo has sent to me a copy of the letter that he has directed to You in order to show the necessities for Libya.

The picture it gives the feeling that the defensive and offensive organization in a generalized manner of Libya is still insufficient in order to be making the forefront of the situation.

The famous effort that You have made up to now to complete for the Libya and your relativity conditions are famous for the efficiency of the army in the Home land and other lands overseas.

The demands for the Armed forces high command North Africa seem to depart from the general situation and only hold account that of Libya.

It will be attempted to do all that is possible in order to meet the needs of Libya, but the real situation of equipment and preparation does not allow a lot: in the attached sheet I indicate what the maximum can be quickly sent and the forecasts for further shipments.

It is to consider that these unexpected pushes to act to various favored fields (A.O.I., Aegean, Libya), as if they were to be separate theaters of operations and to whose war preparation did not have to solely supply an military organization, now also the personal that some are to head, can end by harmfully interfering in the efficiency of the general war situation of the Country.

It is therefore opportune that the demands from Mar. Balbo are not examined as part of the problem, but considered by You Duce, in the great general picture, interested in the merit etc. the Chief of S. M. General and the Chief of the G. S. of the Army

SODDU

Minister Of War
Cabinet

Approximate Sending Possibility
of Material Demanded for Libya

A) For the work of Frontier Defense

Mtr. Fiat 35: demanded 1788. In route 500; another 900 will be sent before July.

Total 1,400. With the weapons, send ammunition.

47/32 Anti-Tank Guns: demanded 390. Some 120 will be sent, of which 50 were prepared for Rumania. In such a way but stopped temporarily increase in army equipment in the homeland.

Bty. Of 77/28: demanded 23. Possible shipment between 6-8 months drawn from materials under repair.

Amour items:: sending it gradually monthly to finish; on basis of previewed production, part within the year and the reminder (to eg. installations for mtr.) before 1942.

Ammunition:

-for Anti- Tank Guns: asked 880,000 rounds. In route 13,000 rounds. *Only half of the units* in Italy have *their equipments*. The production -cause making them at only 40,000 rounds per month;

-for 77/28 pieces: asked 437,000 -availably: none. Of the other part it is not possible for now to send the pieces.

Concrete. Demands: 3 million quintals.

Ecc Balbo had already made current that demanded could be *limited to* 1,500,000 quintals.

Can be sent 1.275.000 q., drawing the least *quantity available* from other requirements in the territory.

B). Territorial air defense

Mobile Groups of A.A. bty.: demands 5 (15 bty.). Is not possible to send some. For the operating army only 10 bty are on had of 75/46 and 14 of 75/C.K.

Asked: 23 modem position A.A. bty. and 50 sections of 20 mm. The nation's territorial defense A.A. is *already so insufficient* to the needs, that it still does not seem possible to decrease them.

C) Allocations of G.U. units

Are in route 170 trucks. Between a month another 250 will be sent

For everything else we could gradually provide you *is not availability*, according to the preparations.

D) *Equipment magazine of the Intendancy to being them to 6 months of autonomy.*

In course of shipment 10 field hospitals (requested 12); sanitary *facilities for two months.*

Demanded commodities: already in course of shipment.

Clothing: in the course of sending materials for 2 months autonomy.

Armament: *will only be possible when you complete the facilities of the units i.e., depending on the production*, after 1940. Will however be sent rifles, pistols and part mtr. requests.

Ammunition: before *two months only small qualities* drawn from production.

Automotive materials: by the *year end* vehicles for 6 divisions. Only between 1 month 20 of the 255 demanded ambulances.

Fuels: another 8.000 t. will be sent within 2 months

APPENDIX 10

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES N. A.

To Chief of the G.S. *Gen. Badoglio.*

Text: 018. *To start.* Hour two of 16 June. Arrival now at Cirene is where established a discreet connection with Tripoli and Rome and I find your two telegrams that of the 14th on the base political-military situation attracting my attention on opportune maneuver mean and that one of the 15 with the notice of shipment via airplane of anti-tank batteries and counseling aviation employment at mass. Replying: is in shipment via to the 10th Anny an assault tank bd. and a artillery regiment drawn from the 5th Anny. Inasmuch as the "Centauro" division is not arriving I have reinforced 10th Anny with the 2nd Libyan division. I will make further efforts but maneuver on wide scale... (1) frontier 1800 km. distant is rendered difficult by truck deficiency and fuel as well as from a water crisis in Marmarica and tanker deficiency. Circa aviation employment yesterday and today... (2); Pricolo has said that aviation can arrive at the last moment from Italy and in fact aircraft arrives, but without adequate mobilization for which is impossible to implant to new fields and most difficult to make livable. You add: today I have discovered that a group of S. 79 joint lately from Italy is completely unarmed and more still I have discovered that S.79 alone carries from 12 to 15 bombs that give 100 kilos for which demand special employment bombs of 15, an aircraft would carry only 180 kilos of bombs! I could continue for three pages. I am satisfied to know that new aircraft arrive without anti-sand intakes remaining in these fields in spite of cures (?) The dustiest are damaged with impressive rapidity. Fortunately the pilots are wonderful and the English know and act prudently. Concluding the single English armored division that is on the front has between 360 armored cars and medium tanks. That he cannot compete with guns and machine-guns but we will not however cease to fight and we will perform miracles but if I were the English commander I would be already be in Tobruk. Vice versa I want to arrive to very soon at the escarpment of Sollum, as from my first plan for the first hour of hostility, retiming to the plan later on at explicit order to remain on the defensive.

BALBO

1 undefined Group.

2 Various undefined groups.

REPORT OF A MEETING AMONG
THE ENTIRE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
On 25 JUNE 1940

Authority present:

Ecc Marshal of Italy Pietro BADOGLIO.
Ecc General of the Army Ubaldo SODDU.
Ecc Admiral of the Fleet Domenico CAVAGNARI.
Ecc General designate of the Army Francisco PRICOLO.
Ecc Lieutenant General Achille STARACE.
Ecc Lieutenant General Mario ROATTA.
Ecc Vice Admiral Edoardo SOMIGLI.
Major General of the air force Giuseppe SANTORO.
Major General Quirino ARMELLINI.

Secretaries:

Colonel A.A. Ferdinand Raffaelli.
Colonel A.A. Pericle Ravagli.
Lieutenant Federico Mohroff- stenographer.

The Excellency Badoglio opens the meeting at 15:40 hours.

S.E. Badoglio -We first examine two issues of limited importance that interest essentially aviation: Gibraltar and Malta. For Gibraltar, we must give the Spanish the fuel, as well as bombs.

S.E. Pricolo -And already been done. The Spanish can give bombs to us for three, four sets of action.

S.E. Badoglio -Since the port of Gibraltar is rather narrow and also contains objectives of great dimension, is from hope, arriving at morning, to achieve good results. The pilots we have and in these days they have demonstrated maximum daring and principle good will. They, will reach Gibraltar on crossing not tired by a long trip at sea, can give a good lesson to English.

You arrange as far as soon as you can.

S.E. Pricolo -Believe that about in two or three days at the max will be able to be acted on

S.E. Badoglio -Good.

Now on to the second issue: Malta. We see the second issue now: Malta. If from *Corsica* they no longer take off in aerial flight against us, Malta must be "sterilized". The first day of good weather you will make a very heavy action, so that the English understand that, also as a beachhead, Malta cannot serve.

These are the two particular subjects about which I want to speak.

We now examine the general problem.

The signing of the armistice with France could be continuation from, two orders of events. The first one, that is favorable to us, is that the Government of the Marshal Petain succeeds to become established. In such case, as the Duce has said, we will not have difficulty until the conclusion of the peace, that it will be an end to the fight with England. We do not have to alarm ourselves if there will be some dissident or some ships who will contravene the orders of the French Government.

Our theatre of war is now moved. The Duce, to which this morning I have introduced a memorandum, has said: "we will wait for two or three days in order to see how that the events will take to unfold. From a radio interception of the Regency of Tunis, I have learned that Peyrouton would have declared a wiliness to obey to the orders of the French Government.

Since from the area to the north we will not have close to nothing to fear, it will be necessary to supply to a new alignment of the forces, since the more vulnerable regions are now Sicily, Sardinia, Calabria and Neapolitan. The G.S. of the Army will see if it is the case to reinforce these regions, since obvious that is given the fifty kilometers of militarized zone, enough to hold a echelon of emergency behind and a staggering of troops, placed in good living conditions, ready, if necessary, to go forward.

Beyond this, it is necessary to examine the issue of the Anti-air defense. The means, comprised batteries of German 88's, are centered in the localities more subject to incursions like Cagliari, Palermo, Sassari, Trapani.

Our main theater of operations is moved, been able to be said, from Italy to Libya. A clarified situation, if the Duce approves of, I will pass to Libya to the dependencies of the General Staffs of the Armed Forces given the necessity of a more intimate connection and in order to assure a more intense chain of reinforcements.

I place this question to the General Staff so that it can at once do a study by its competent organs, on the question that derives from the supposition -in me a lot taken root -that Tunisia remains perfectly calm and it allows us to act towards the east. I have written this morning to Balbo, Assuring him that in this month he will receive the demanded material. I have recommended first closing all the doors of house: after it will think eventually to act. He must remember that in war two things turn difficultly to success.

While G.S. of the Army studies the possibility of our offensive towards Egypt. And a large problem, since in order to arrive at Marsa Matruk is 220 km. of desert and equally to you some of them are here. The English soldiers are surely less adapted then ours in order to exceed these difficulties.

The case could be made that the situation became serious for Great Britain in Egypt and for us it convene to make a decisive point, that it would serve to give to the Duce that element of consistency for his pretensions towards Egypt.

As I have said, N.A. must be put in good efficiency and therefore General Pricolo recapitulate the demands made by Balbo in matter for aircraft and ways of fulfilling them as soon as possible.

S.E. Pricolo -the shipment of airplane is subordinated to the subject of the bases and the availability in place of the bombs and the benzene.

S.E. Badoglio -It must space out sending into two phases. First restorations of the number of aircraft and given a few fighters, then, start the increase of the forces.

The port of Tripoli is full of steamships. Can those be chosen fast enough for making the return trip?

S.E. Cavagnari -a week ago the Duce has authorized the evacuation of the ports of Tripoli, Tobruk and of the Aegean, forming of convoys of steamships of equal speed. The Governors had not believed about the leaving.

S.E. Badoglio -If you had followed the regular way of address them to me, instead going directly from the Duce, I would have our thoughts.

S.E. Cavagnari -It was an issue that interested the Merchant marine and the issue was made from the Host Venturi, since it was not directly related to the Comando Supremo.

S.E. Badoglio -Now it is decidedly related to the Comando Supremo.

S.E. Cavagnari -If the situation will be developed favorable to us, the transport along the Tunisian coast will be able to succeed enough sure.

S.E. Badoglio -Concluding, for N.A., since it will probably have a single front, it is not necessary to send more men: perhaps some of them are enough; it is instead necessary to send materials, supply and shares of aircraft in two parts. For The E. A. have told the Duce that is a serious case: we will see if the aircraft can be transported. However, I believe that Pinna has cried a little too much, since ours actions and those adversaries are balanced.

The A.C. lacks benzene and rubber. The Duce has personally charged Cobolli Gigli to begin negotiations, that are already in course, for Japanese supplies to E.A. The colony of the Aegean for now (I do not reinforce: it is in better conditions of resistance among the Italian overseas lands. Draft to look at if will be able to give them a little aviation.

S.E. Pricolo -Given that in the Aegean we have a discreet benzene supply, would be opportune to send them 18 S.79 which, leaving from Rhodes, will be able to act on Alexandria.

S.E. Badoglio -It goes well: I plan to make a temporary reinforcement.

S.E. Pricolo -For the aircraft destined to E.A. it is necessary to ensure that they are not withheld in Libya.

S.E. Badoglio -Allowed to me to make.

For the Armistice Commission it will be necessary to name a president and numerous sub commissioners. It is necessary that the president is an element who beyond to the acquaintance of the matter and the acquaintance of the uses and the habits of the various people, has undisputed authority in order to direct the sub commissioners. I have given the Duce a name and he will decide. When he is named, we will call him to the General Staff and we will give precise directives to him that is concrete about a special meeting. The Chiefs of the G.S. now study the problem to give suggestions for the cases.

S.E. Cavagnari -I would want to make present the necessity that the president of the Armistice Commission is an authority also in the cares of the rank since I must send a vice admiral which must deal with French admirals of equal rank.

S.E. Badoglio -What I have proposed has the ranks that convene. Then we are understood; as soon as ready to acted in the direction indicated on the objectives of Malta and Gibraltar?

S.E. Pricolo -We must also add Alexandria?

S.E. Badoglio -Alexandria comes in due time. Now it interests us to neutralize, as the Duce says, Malta and to act on Gibraltar if we can count on surprise is therefore to hope for a good result.

S.E. Pricolo -For the eventual course of air force in Germany have any thoughts?

S.E. Badoglio -the Duce has said to me this morning that he will write to Hitler. Make the alignment as if you did not have to send anything. In any case it will be a matter of an exchange. To us they would give Stukas.

S.E. Pricolo -Only aircraft, since we have able pilots.

S. E. Badoglio -I have said to the Duce the difficulties met by the army on the Alps; of the snow to the necks, the necessity to use chains of bearers, etc. Then this data will have to be gathered and be given to Pavolini so as to illustrate them.

S.E. Pricolo -In the current situation, can we make photographic reconnaissance of Algeria and Tunisia?

S.E. Cavagnari -The reconnaissance of the French bases would be able to also profit us.

S.E. Badoglio -For some days they are not made. For the moment it is not opportune to go stimulate them.

The meeting adjourned at 16:15 hours.

Minutes of Meeting
Called on the Day of 4 July 1940 -XVIII
AT CIRENE:

Present:

Ecc. Marshal of Italy GRAZIANI.
Ecc. General designated of Anny GARIBOLDI.
Ecc. General designated of Anny BERTI.
Ecc. Lieutenant general of air force PORRO.
Ecc. Lieutenant general TELLERA.
Admiral BRIVONESI.
Aid to general MIELE (reporter and secretary).

Graziani -He asks situation and tasks for the naval units located in N. A.

Brivonesi -Displays given and specifies Marilibia* tasks (close protection of our bases; maintenance of the emergency routes; protection of means used after mine clearance; supply and protection of the costal traffic, when suggested from the nature of the transport). Precisely, to demand, that the eventual concurrent ground operations the land authorities of the two commanders of maritime areas (Tripoli and Tobruk) to give the respective means at their command, to the Marilibia Commander can be demanded directly from the concurrent with the aid of the naval forces of the two areas.

To demand, he adds that troop transport via sea or materials from Tripolitania to Cyrenaica is still feasible, with lesser risks to those coming from the Motherland.

Graziani -Held account serious losses endured by our air force caused by bombing, invited the Aerolibia** Commander to study greater possibility dispersing aircraft, to increase their concealment.

Porro -He outlines provisions put into effect and in course, also in the cares of the aircraft by transport to tributary fields.

Graziani -Recapitulates the land forces situation and concludes that, holding average account of the impoverishment of transport quickly from the 5th Anny, no inflow of relief is by now very possible from that one to the 10th Army, to the inferiority of the transports already in route.

There remain the possibility via airplane -in part already in course of exploitation -and that by way of the sea, for transfer of troops

* Libyan Naval Dept.

** Libyan Air Dept

Berti -He believes that eventual inflow of personnel to Tobruk it would render the problem of supplying water more serious.

Graziani -Totally in agreement. He thinks it has reached the saturation point of men on the eastern front. Every further inflow it would record on the logistic index negatively. He specifies that the more urgent transport from the Tripolitania would be that -via sea -of one division to locate on the southern margin of the Cyrenaica Gebel in order to constitute a protecting flank defense on the Tmini-Ezzeiat-Mechili line.

General Gariboldi and the Chief of the G. S. invites to study the convenience and possibility of the transport and asks if there would be an adequate means.

Brivonesi -Not more today, since the empty steamboats have been recalled to Italy. They could hardly serve as those that will transport the tanks, to recall them from Benghazi disembarkation.

Berti -To require he communicates that, also being to acquaintance of ideas or caress purposes of offensive character from Balbo Marshal, he has never received orders on that purpose or other communications circa the performance to date.

Graziani -States that have occurred between communications Chief of the G. S. G and Supreme Commander N. A. -which has looked over the last, 2 in Cyrene – shows the existence of a concept offensive against Egypt, to be implemented towards the 15 current and this is confirmed in the telegram signed by Badoglio received last night gives a reading with the answer worded. From this it appears that will do as much as possible, in relation to the current situation of the forces and the means and the nature of the theatre of operations, without allowing beyond possibility. Examines the situation itself, and one that will accrue with the influx of medium tanks and materials that the Ministry can grant; summarizes the characteristics of the soil from the other side of the border from which it appears that there is only one road on the coastline and that the rest is desert, to conclude that the will is 15 we will be ready to operate solely on the coastal route, without possibility of lateral maneuvers.

He examines the same situation, and that one that will acquire with the inflow of the medium tanks and of the materials that the Ministry will be able to grant; he synthesizes the characteristics of the land beyond the frontier from which appears that an only road exists on the coastal strip and that all the rest is desert, in order to conclude that the 15th we will have to be able be ready to operate only on the coastal direction, without possibility of lateral maneuvers.

Berti -Signals the existence of a second road or track that falls in the Sollum area: that one coming from El Augerin, which could be taken advantage of, without what it constitutes, but, the possibility of maneuver.

Graziani -Agree. If the time did not make defect, would have thought to an attack in force from Giarabub for Siwa on one of the crossroads that head for the shoreline respective to Sidi Barrani, Marsa Matruh and Geràwla, in conjunction with an parachutists attack to the rear of the enemy.

But especially before it demands adequate and meticulous organization, what to create to exclude the possibility affect them in this first phase.

Berti. -He observes that Siwa would turn out strongly occupied (saying about 10 thousand men). The commander of the garrison of Giarabub cannot supply precise elements since he is practically blocked and he does not have suitable means.

Graziani. -Premised how much before, the action could not be that gradual: initially, the 15th, we will attack the enemy forces along the coastal director with Sollum as the objective; subsequently (soon after, if the enemy had immediately to yield, that is to put into effect further organization, if necessary) he will be proceeded beyond. A lot earned if, occupying Sollum, we will be able to lively penetrate in forces the enemy territory. Naturally we will keep ourselves in a position to profiting every favorable situation; the occupation of Sollum -essentially made with troops on foot -will constitute the beginning of an action whose ulterior development will be determined from the contingencies. In the meantime is hoped other means reaches us from Italy, principally the trucks, merchandise which make possible to put into effect the maneuvered action of the motorized units.

Berti. -He asks for how many motorized units we will be able then to arrange.

Graziani. -He cannot specify. The difficulties of supply of the trucks are strong also in Italy (citing of the relative data to the yield of the requisition). We will hold to base the situation of the moment. For now the Command of the Army will have to exactly study the single possibilities of action on basis to the various permissible logically situations.

On the exposed criteria now invites the G. S., Marilibia, Aero-Libya and Army Command to compile an agreement the studies, holding to the base the date of the 15th current.

Berti. -Recommends the timely supply of ammunitions currently to Tobruk (between Tobruk and Bardia exists only two unit of fire) and reports the serious difficulties of the water service, as potentiality, as is the means of transport, whose deficiency strongly is felt from all the units, with the exception of the 2nd Libyan division. He remembers finally the necessity of being able to timely arrange a place of adequate fuel reserves.

Graziani. -He asks as the completed water advancing service could be organized.

Berti and Brivonesi. -To Captured Sollum, if English will not destroy the systems that is by means of the aid of small tankers.

Minutes of Meeting
Called the Day of 4 July 1940 -XVIII
AT CIRENE:

Berti. -Recommends the performance of the various items from his report in the memorandum of 1st July also collected by Lt. Col. Sorrentino.

Gariboldi -It is what are the G.S. is doing here and General D'Aponte in Rome.

Graziani. -Recapitulating. The provisions of immediate performance remain therefore defined:

- transport via sea, when possible, of the destined division for the vigilance of the Gebel Cyrenaica;
 - meet at Derna of the 7th Libyan Bn. to be transported via the area from Tripolitania, from the mobile reservoir of the Armed forces high command;
 - study of the action and competition of the artilleries, motor vehicles etc from the previous study;
 - The inflow of ammunition from Benghazi and provision for water service and fuels.
- In the meantime the noted Air Force step, is reordered, Fortify so that 15th can concur with all its forces in a crushing way.

REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD NEAR TENUTASI
THE JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF
2 JULY 1940

Authorities present:

Ecc Marshal of Italy Peter BADOGLIO.
Ecc Lieutenant general Ubaldo SODDU.
Ecc Admiral of the Fleet Domenico CAVAGNARI.
Ecc General designate of Army Francisco PRICOLO.
Ecc Lieutenant general Achille STARACE.
Ecc Lieutenant general Mario ROATTA.
Ecc Vice admiral Edoardo SOMIGLI.
Ecc Lieutenant general of the air force Giuseppe SANTORO.
Ecc Major general Quirino ARMELLINI.

Secretaries:

Col. A.A. Ferdinand Raffaelli.
Col. A.A. Delio. VECCHI
Lt. Federico MOHRHOFF -stenographer.

Ecc. Badoglio opens the meeting at 16:10 hours.

Ecc. Badoglio- The Duce this morning insisted he be sent as soon as possible the lists the names of the dead, injured and missing referring to losses of June. We will add then a list had losses among civilians, which we will be provided by the Prefectures, in so that you know the contribution of blood that gave Italy at that time.

The Duce would also like that before July are defined the all rewards be for acts of gallantry awarded in June in this respect, the Duce said to instruct the Admiral who is part of the Armistice Commission, to friendly inquire of the French colleague to find out if France actually lost a DD in the clash in which the Calatafimi took part and now that we are in charge, since the public has seen promoted the sinking Calypso and no rewards was given to the Commander of Calatafimi. Therefore he remains puzzled

Ecc Cavagnari - In my view, that, regardless of the results achieved, Brignole can be awarded as he deserves, given the act performed.

Ecc Badoglio. -Okay; However, it should shed some light on this episode-Malta in recent actions have observed the presence of aircraft?

Ecc. Pricolo-airports seem deserted, but there may be some air cavern. It is not ruled out that the planes are withdrawn and do you call to perform actions such as Augusta. Of ships, has noted that the presence of some destroyers and some submarines. Must continue to bomb, even without anything to say in the newsletter, as I have already mentioned to Gen Armellini.

Ecc Badoglio -For Gibraltar difficulties are what??

Ecc Pricolo-The Spaniards refused at the last moment the assistance promise; Perhaps as a result of the change of the Air Ministry, which occurred in recent days Had already sent 20 aircraft and had been preparing bombs and gasoline required just before the action began to raise difficulties so we had to get back the planes General Banerjee sent or speak directly with Franco and we also interested Foreign countries to clarify the situation perhaps we will authorize the first action we had planned : departure from Italy and, after the bombing, landing at Cartagena to supply for the return trip.

However, there will be a chance to use them as a base, not permanent, but neither say temporary, as it had been already presented.

Ecc. Badoglio -I will speak to the Duce tonight. Cavagnari indicates at Alexandria the presence of four engined reconnaissance aircraft. We have sent to Rhodes 12 – S. 79 who served very well, "mashing" for a day and a half a convoy. So we are preventing the British to run far and wide in the Eastern Mediterranean. De Vecchi insists that can accommodate other aircraft besides those twelve.

Ecc. Pricolo-before sending aircraft to be sure of sufficient equipment of the bases, to avoid the problems that occurred in Libya. Ecc. De Vecchi has assured me that the fields are ready and equipped; We can then send aircraft for about ten days if it were to be a permanent employment, I believe that we should send more material.

Ecc. Badoglio. -I do not exclude that it is permanently.

Ecc. Pricolo. -In this case we will return.

Ecc. Badoglio. -How many bombing aircraft has De Vecchi?

Ecc. Pricolo. -forty.

Ecc. Badoglio. -Now we have bad weather in the Eastern Mediterranean and *ghibli* in Cyrenaica, then wait before sending other aircraft.

Meanwhile, telegraph to De Vecchi to start the action on Alexandria just enough time. I allow and with that; they are enough to make a very substantial bombing. From interception will know the results you get, then we will send a temporary reinforcement to the Aegean, withdrawing after using it.

Ecc. Pricolo. -think would think even the bombing of Haifa. We recently issued equipment, which could also act starting from the Aegean. I think it worthwhile to study an action of this kind for the goals that offers: deposits of fuel oil, oil, etc.. At worst a unit in distress could land in Syria.

Ecc. Badoglio. -Okay. Examined the issue. As for the army, the Duce was very pleased with what he saw. The troops are presented so beautifully and he noted *de visu* the enormous obstacles surmounted. Write a letter to H.R.H. the Prince di Piemonte expressing his satisfaction. Also visit the wounded, found their spirits high and was well impressed. Troop behavior in conditions so difficult is cause for great satisfaction. Now we must hasten to be sure to have more relief of the Alps, because use of troops in that sector.

Ecc. Roatta. -We planned to leave in the advanced position a Division for each Director and the rest in lower valleys to a mass of 17 divisions, including two divisions at our disposal in the event that you were to do the action of Ticino. The Po army begins to move tomorrow to its previous location. The seventh army is reconstituted on six divisions. I would like to ask if you might expect the need for some movement towards the East.

Ecc. Badoglio. -For the moment, no. The situation in the Balkans is quite turbulent, for which over the Russian advance, there are also Hungarian and Bulgarian movements. Have not yet reported developments in this situation; It is to be expected that if something happens it will be difficult to maintain peace in the Balkans. With

a reconstitution of the 7th Army, we will be able to cope with any situation eastward.

Ecc. Roatta. -There are four complete armies available: 2nd, 8th, Po and 7th.

Ecc. Badoglio. -more than enough for what we need. I think I need to strengthen further the Sicily and Sardinia for which I do not think it is likely an attempted invasion of those islands. An issue that presses a lot is that of the convoy that must carry 70 medium tanks to Benghazi, crucial for Graziani to move from defense to offense. We have to be sure that these tanks arrive at their destination; so the Navy must escort the convoy with all units of the fleet. If the British want to thwart the journey, we are happy to deal with them, since I have perfect confidence that in the event of a collision we will screw them. The Navy G. S. consider thing with the utmost care: you must go there from the rulers.

Ecc. Somigli. -We are ready to march in this sense. If there is a action between Heraklion and Cyrene the convoy will get away eventually to Tripoli

Ecc. Badoglio. -For those days General Pricolo, which has always been a huge good will so far. It'll completely at the disposal of the Navy for the entire security service; not only that, but held all the bombers of Sicily ready to intervene at the first sign. We must leave no stone unturned to help the Navy in this circumstance, both as a reconnaissance entity and as for bombers. So for those days we will give orders that all air units of Libya, less any amount, is ready to intervene. I did telegraph to Graziani for seaplanes in the *sebca* near Benghazi for reconnaissance action.

Ecc Somigli. -We would have to maintain absolute secretly on this convoy.

Ecc Badoglio. -We will maintain the secret it goes without saying.

Ecc. Pricolo. -Can we remove the devices from the fields of deployment of Piedmont and Lombardy, making them return to their normal bases? This measure would be excluded for the Veneto.

Ecc Badoglio. -You provide yourselves in such a way.

(the meeting is adjourned at 16:35 hours).

MINISTRY OF WAR
CABINET

Rome, 10 July 1940-XVIII

REINFORCEMENTS FOR N.A.

G.S.R. Army, because new Libya situation (operations on a single border, changer of Commander), brought to Rome the Intendant General D'Aponte, in order to realize Libya needs, possibilities and consignment planning.

G.S. reports, as agreed:

-all previous requests made by Sup. Command Armed Forces N.A.. and not met 1 July they are lapsed;

-requests in place and the measures provided for are:

a): health service

- requests 35 hospitals of c.: will be sent only from 28 hospitals prepared in the territory. Ready embarkation within the current 15 will be shipped with the next convoy;

- requests 4 surgical sections: will be sent by removing West Frontier (mode c.s.);

-200 ambulances requests: as already reported at V.E., will be sent only a section of 20 ambulances and 40 buses. There is no availability;

-Bacteriological Laboratory for tenth Army: will be sent;

-2 hospital ships-requests in the country only 2-one will be sent one to Cyrenaica, where already is another;

-beds: very urgent former request of Mar. Balbo now no longer required: 3000 seats already sent; If you do not do, they won't be unloaded anyway and will be returned;

-Autobaths -asked 10 - Because the unavailability, will send 10 showers baths, removed from Army Corps in the territory;

-there will be sent 3 sanitary type material equipments for Army depots.

b) Commissariat service:

food:

-Cyrenaica- have for 3 months (until September), except for wine (t. 1,500), dry beans (. 500), flour (t. 2,500), mineral water bottles (1 million), lemons (3 million).

-*Tripolitania* -equipments *had on order more than 3 months*, small frozen meat, which requirements will be specified. It will be supplied dispatching lacking kinds, in part already organized.

Clothing and equipment:

They will *continue sending the consignments begun* before June to the magazines of the Army. In particular said dispatches reflect:

200,000 spiked shoes, 50,000 cloth uniforms and 50,000 cloth bolts for stretch, 150,000 shirts.

c) *artillery service:*

Arms:

-*pistol* mod. 34 -asked 400 (many unit officers *unarmed*): they will be sent;

-*guns mtr.* 500, 81 mm. mortars: 10 = they will be *sent*;

-the equipment to *complete all* of the *units*, including G.a.F., for 47 mm. and 20 mm. pieces;

-asked 500 assault mortars: *some 432 will be sent*, with which the *possibility to complete all*

units

Of the 5 metropolitan divs. and to constitute a *reserve*;

ammunition:

Sup. Command Armed Forces N.A. would *want to arrive at in Cyrenaica* the following situation:

-14 unfoc per mobile artillery;

-15 unfoc per infantry arm;

-6 unfoc hand bombs.

Therefore, in particular:

has requested

2 million 20 mm armor-piercing

determined provision

It had already been sent as for bullets any antiaircraft type previous demand: 600,000 c.a. which

probably will be given back

Sent 30.000 armor-piercing already:

in course of dispatching 60,000.

No other to be available, subsequently will be supplied with production:

40 or 50.000 per month).

100,000 -65 mm armor-piercing

Availabilities most insufficient

arranged for now shipment of

approximately 4,000 rounds.

120,000 -77/28 shells

No availability.

10 million cart. for fuc, mtr. ammunition will be sent.	They lack magazines -disengaged
9 million cartridges for Schwarzlose mitr	they are not availability -production underway will be sent.
1 million cart. 8 mm. armor-piercing -it will be supplied when possible.	they are not availability

Beyond the aforesaid provisions, from which most notable insufficient availabilities are 20 mm. armor-piercing bullets and smaller bores for fighting tanks, have arranged shipment of: 100,000 ordinary shots and 200,000 47 mm armor-piercing, 350,000 -75/27 mm, 250,000 -100 mm., 100,000 -105 mm, 2 million 8 mm, cart. ord., 100,000 -45 mm. and 81 mm. bombs, 500,000 hand bombs

-asked: 30,000 illuminant rockets -case unavailable, will send 2,000 -81 mm. illuminant.

d) engineer service

Will continue already started course of type equipment for armed forces magazine.

e) water service

Will be sent with urgency:

-270 metal tanks of 1,250 liters, 6 of 2,000, 50 of 500 liters;

-maximum quantitative possible of barrows, drums, etc;

-already in course shipment of 300 tanks of 3 mc., fixed on balance and Mobile.

f) motor service

asked for a thousand for motor vehicles -Cause *organic deficiency* of the units in territory (circa 40% war time complement) and impossible to deprive the army of the Po, agreed shipment only:

-2 auto units heavy and 1 light one -(today already prepared and will depart with the next convoy);

-160 heavy tractors L.37, 41 trucks and 72 tows. In total 760 motor vehicles will be sent in the month;

-13 machine-shop trucks;

fuel:

-fuel is not need for the moment -In the Cyrenaica alone, in spite of the concentration nearly all Libya motor vehicles, are autonomy of two and half months

-moreover already arrived yesterday at Benghazi steamship *Barbaro* with more than 6,000 Tons. fuel, yes that situation does not give any worry;

-it is necessary to retrieve very soon a part of the 300,000 sent dispatch -therefore Libya will hold in drums fuels for only 2 months, the rest will send back to Italy with return of empty means,

The G.S. has also communicated much of the above to the Comando Supremo.

Note for V.E.

Secret

COMANDO SUPREMO -Joint Chief of Staff
Operations section

11 July 1940-XVIII

Prot. n. 1239; Op.

Subject: Strategic directives.

Superesercito. .

Supermarina.

Superaereo.

Supercomando A.S.I.

Egeomil- Rodi.

and, for information:

Undersecretary of State for War.

Supercomando A.O.I.

Concluded and now the Armistice with France, our military situation remains substantially simplified.

Much of the first army operating in the Alps is starting up in the middle of the Po Valley, where will be measurement direct promptly and concentrate as much as North East, depending on what your needs may require.

For now, and not considered the Empire that is in operation theatre itself, there is only one land border on which to act: the Cyrenaica. The Governor-General of Libya received precise directives from me about the conduct to be followed. There is now that send them by any means all materials required that he may soon be able to carry out the task assigned to him, a task of fundamental importance and strategic policy.

The French Navy's disappearance there remains active only the English Navy in two nuclei: the most numerous in Alexandria and another that relies on Gibraltar.

Our Marina, centrally located between the two nuclei, is in good condition to take advantage of this separateness of enemy forces.

It is therefore necessary to maintain and develop increasingly broad discovery service to be able to intervene at the appropriate time.

Our naval forces, including two of 35 thousand to be able shortly to take part in active operations, are such that they can advantageously be address one than the other two groups.

Our air force has now in a decisive superiority over the Mediterranean. Aside from sighting service for which as I have said above should be devoted all the treatments, our air force has three goals to beat: Malta, Alexandria, the enemy fleet at sea.

But the intervention against these objectives must be made by the masses of aircraft to subsequent waves from low rates that cannot produce that damage minimum.

For all operating forces, matter the most and daring decision, without that action would remain sterile or even negative.

These directives inform your action.

*Il Duce of fascism
First Marshal of the Empire
Supreme Commander of the armed forces
MUSSOLINI*

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES North Africa

TOP COMMAND FF. AA. NORTH AFRICA

At Comando Supremo.

01//Op 206500.1299/Op Tt. July 15. Purposes that I intend to do with the occupation of Sollum up to the Halfaya Wadi are following: 1st: remove at opponent base where his troubling for offenses & daily against lead our forces in enemy territory; 2nd: remove pressure from our rectangular border line at Sidi Barrani i.e. at 100 km, regaining freedom movement & long track on the wire, finishing where I serve as the basis for employment which may secondarily Siwa time be starting point for the threat back same Sidi Barrani & Marsa Matruh; 3rd: have departure from Sollum base that Tobruk when it comes to action at bottom with all advantages; 4th: raise troops & population morale already depressed by reverses suffered in early campaign. Given what this communicates for now. Command action I pause.

GRAZIANI

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COMANDO SUPREMO

To Excellency Graziani.

1311 -15 2 July at 09:45. As I inform you will have to day 27 in Benghazi six ships that will carry nearly all material required. Then that on these ships there is also a longshoremen company, so you can quickly unload and all the materials you need. But as soon as you do that it will need at least a week. So I think you will be able to launch the attack with strategic objective between three and four. This place fully endorsing your & approving exposed considerations in telegram 01/206500.Op. It remains only to decide what time interval is convenient that intercede between creating new base beginning at Sollum & operations more outreach. The Duce to which I submitted your telegram approves that you make preliminary operation on the day you choose. Send me your decisions news by air so that I can immediately inform the Duce.

BADOGLIO

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 2023 of prot. Op.

Tripoli, 23 July 1940-XVIII

Attached Maps: one memorandum.

*To his Excellently the Marshal of Italy Knight Pietro Badoglio Duca di Addis Abeba -
Chief of the General Staff -Rome.*

Your Excellently,

completed tasks that I was to undertake in Tripoli and which I mentioned in my telegram 2011 op. of the 20th us I would put the aware of the main measures implemented in these three weeks, since I assumed the Comando Superiore, and give you a picture even summary of the current situation.

I'm therefore a memory in which I fixed the major points and, where necessary, provisions that could improve the situation itself for the purposes of future tasks assigned to the Armed Forces of I.N.A.

GRAZIANI

MEMORANDUM RELATIVE TO THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE FORCES AND MEANS IN I.N.A.

A) ORDERING OF THE Armed Forces GROUND..

The emergency situation following the Italian-French Armistice had necessarily given to the Cyrenaican theater the utmost importance and had placed in the foreground of his defensive reinforcement problem.

The 10th Army was coming automatically absorbing all the forces and means from Tripolitania had been transferred to Cyrenaica, while the 5th Army had assumed the character, which still retains, of a feeding reservoir.

Of 5 divisions initially stationed in Cyrenaica there were added 2 (the "23 Marzo" and "2nd Libya") transferred from Tripolitania, so in the last week of June the 10th Army was made up of three corps. (XXI, XXII, XXIII) with 7 divisions altogether

The first operations were then shown that the means of fire, army and more particularly the mobile artillery, were absolutely insufficient to neutralize the sudden and frequent offenses that enemies mechanized transport operated with impunity on our troops and our communications, on the back of defensive organization, border with serious consequences of moral character. From this determination, implemented before I reach Tripoli, transfer from West to East most 5th Army mobile artillery batteries (from 20 and 47, integral 20th rgt of Corp and the 12th rgt. Of the "Savona" Inf. Div.).

The effectiveness of this artillery reinforcement proved fully adequate for the past couple of weeks the enemy uses his armored cars with much greater caution and without appreciable successes.

Reaching N.A., I worried now of the integral defense of the theater, examining the possibility that a deplorable collapse Tobruk - Bardia Harbour (where gathered the 10th Army) would allow the enemy to penetrate the Cyrenaica plateau still inhabited by national and indigenous civilian population. Then immediately moved into the area by Barce the "Sirte" Division (which is already in place for ten days), while at the same time I was organizing a steering control system with the Royal Carabinieri along the foothills Tmimi-el Ezzeiat-el-Mechil - Zauia en Neian - el Charruba- Zauia Msus -Saunnu- Sahabi-Maragh – Augila.

Ensured in the defense of the region, and in relation to different offensive task that the Comando Supremo in late June had assigned to the forces of N.A. have subsequently given rise to a "Southern Oasis" grouping, the orders of General Maletti, an expert of the region, with which I intend, as I have already telegraphed, operate from Giarabub on Siwa and thence towards the coast (Marsa Matruh) or of the Nile Valley , depending on the circumstances.

In closing I will say of this grouping, composed of 7 Libyan battalions mostly veterans, from units of light tanks, artillery and three companies in Saharan trucks, is mostly already collected at Derna and among a dozen days-when will stream here trucks being shipped from Italy-will also be able to move to its area of application.

In the area of equipment, similar measures had already allowed to transfer to Cyrenaica most efficient trucks located in N.A. with orders from me now given (the main reason of my coming to Tripoli) this majority has come almost all. The G. U.s of Tripolitania retain a number of vehicles closely to their daily life (to facilitate what I put them all astride the railway) everything else is or is about to move to Cyrenaica.

Hand in hand and automotive repair shops-both civilian and military, have stepped up well repair of 1800 trucks that wear, usury, the difficulties and lengths of the paths and the incompetence of the drivers made inefficient and whose restoration will be significantly benefited by the inflow of skilled personnel required days ago to the General staff of the Army (teleavio, 2005 op. of 18 us).

With these provisions and with the aid of civilian vehicle, which I squeezed to the last, a sensitive contribution will be given to the operation of automotive service.

The need, finally, to have artillery and destruction of counter-battery, when appropriate we will face the defensive organization of semi-field Marsa Matruh, led me to absorb, in favor of the eastern sector, the last 60 100/17 howitzers and 24 105/28 guns which were still available at the 5th Army and today these artillery, all framed in organic units, are marching toward the Cyrenaica, where will the mass of fire to my direct orders.

The constitution that the 10th Army has taking as a result of the first reinforcements, I had already suggested to give to armed forces of Cyrenaica a better meeting the possibility of control and use of G.U..

Further substantial inflow which I did now mention, along with the 4th Infantry tank from Italy, made mandatory a new order that is now in force and is summarized in the attached framework*.

For clarification, I added that I wanted General Gallina in charge of the "Libyan divisions Group" for whom different training address given to the two divisions and the moral consequences particularly resented by the 1st Libyan division (following the painful episodes of the period 11-16 June) made a vigorous impulse urgent moral and material at two units, with a view to their further use on the battlefield.

In this way, the Commander of the 10th Army, which may be wholly or partly decentralized the Libyan divisions group, can also make use of the experimental capacity of General Gallina.

This grouping of forces is of course reflected in the Organization of the Intendenza, which, while continuing to depend on Comando Superiore, will be its own delegation at the 10th Army and will directly to the needs of the other G.U.

Is also reflected in the organization of the Royal Carabinieri, whose territorial service is that mobile is now headed exclusively to Comando Superiore, to which arm I have entrusted the task of

* Omitted.

coastal surveillance of militia, whose members, almost all farmers have demobilized because wait more profitably to compelling work of the field.

Always in this order of ideas, because the lure of belonging to ordinary Militia had jeopardized not only agricultural jobs, but also all other vital activities and needs of the colony, I placed the four M.V.S.N. battalions already in place in N A (all four in precarious conditions of strength , training and armament) are contracts into a single unit of formation, by selecting the components and providing it with adequate armament. This unit will soon be able to take its place among the operating units of the army.

B) OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES

I have already exposed my operational concepts of general principle.

I will give details at the appropriate time on the development that will take over operations for both tightly, and drew the defense from likely offenses which may be directed against us from enemy naval forces during our advance.

Pending the implementation of forces and especially of the means (subject to the arrival of the convoy from Italy), the 10th Army's all attested on the frontier with its 5 organic divisions which are two Libyan divisions the two forts of Tobruk and Bardia in full efficiency. Communications between them Giarabub controlled by us manned properly, albeit under the control, outreach, mobile enemy forces.

The orders given to the 10th Army must ensure the possession of the Fort Capuzzo, to which the enemy has twice attempted to remove our future line of departure to abusive and complete employment system from it made in the first days of operations along the frontier trail Port Bardia- Giarabub (junctions and pools of Sidi Omar- Bir esc Sceferzen- esc Scegga- Uescechet - Heira) , occupations that it exploits advantageously what basis and departure of its mechanized units and to interdict all traffic with Giarabub.

In this regard I added that I already put in the budget-reoccupation in its time-of those nodes that may be interested in our offensive operations and that the garrison of Giarabub, so far supplied with provisions through the plane, launched supply can now take advantage of air-transport as it could restore the landing fields, the activity of our units- generally – truck carried along the border strip is constant as I said first, this activity has paralyzed the harassing of the British armored car stream this contributed essentially to our assignment columns

large mobile shares of 20, 47 and of 65/17 truck carried artillery immediate use and well coordinated proved very effective.

C) EMPLOYMENT OF AVIATION.

The problem of anti-aircraft suffers, among all military organizations, major weaknesses just as it is for naval defense of the landfalls.

The defense of Tripoli. Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk and even Port Bardia-so frequently exposed to raids and aerial and naval offences of the enemy-not respond in order. Simply to mention that Benghazi has four 75 /27 batteries on wheeled carriages, occasionally posted on parapets; Derna a few machine guns and Tripoli the same equipment and organization of all unequal to needs.

These considerations and the fact that the port of Tripoli is not immune from offenses, led me to discard a shift of resources from Tripoli to Benghazi. I am limited to disarm the four Zuara 77/28 batteries available but to arm with Benghazi everything. I think bombing damage in Benghazi in the special conditions of activity in which the harbor works and the presence of significant military targets etc would be a serious miscalculation.

Knowing the difficulties that remain in the Motherland, I did not want to make particular requests I can only conclude that the problem exists in all its gravity and urgency and that each Providence that you could implement would of vital utilities,

D) VARIOUS BENEFITS

In parallel with the measures mentioned above, other provisions have been implemented or are being implemented. Hint only to those who purchase the most important purposes of efficiency N.A. beneficial or require provisions by the central authorities.

Transport via sea.

The convoy system offers the greatest safeguards; but it is of course the most expeditious. Confirmation of this is the delay in receiving the convoy implementation currently under construction in Italy seems Not to discard the steamers aid of medium or small tonnage that reach Tripoli along the

Tunisian-Tripoli coast and then without any escort, may constitute a continuous intake, though not large, the problem of supplies. Such a system is currently being followed between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and particularly from Benghazi to Derna, Tobruk and Port Bardia with satisfactory results.

Use of ports.

The unified service of Benghazi with the establishment of a single Commissioner (General Officer), analogous to providence is like going to Tobruk (Captain).

Supermarina allowed the establishment of a temporary base at Ain Gazala, to serve only as landing fuel storage.

Besides the G.aF there are currently in Tripolitania six divisions of the 5th Army (about 60 thousand men) This necessarily their dismembered their artillery and impoverished of vehicles, they have lost all vitality.

Remains of food weight such a quota, where military purposes it could be reduced to a couple of divisions, the remaining returned. Is this a decision that involves political issues and also, for the purposes of return, by sea, by many dozens of thousands of men. As such, it is beyond my competence; I felt equally make mention both for moral reasons and for the benefit of immediate and mediated logistics that would be.

A similar problem is urgent for thousands of workers engaged in the work of western Libya defensive, whose continuation is naturally bound to the political-military situation that will arise on that border. I hope solve myself in place this problem, be sure that when these workers away of the present activity does not result in unemployment for them — a truck absorption so jealously or, when they recovered you wanted to transfer to Cyrenaica, for road works or otherwise, in a logistic, though worsening, the best solution would be to repatriate as soon as they are not further usable.

Marshal of Italy
Comandante Superiore Armed Forces. N. A.
R. GRAZIANI

COMADO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA

n. 03/Op.

Benghazi, 29 July '40/XVIII

Marshal Badoglio -Rome.

Your letter 1510 Op. of July 26 I received this evening, your Excellency, having already drafted my report n. 01/206500 that a copy I sent to you.

It concludes by stating the influence of climatic conditions and water of Marmarica, operating with strategic objective, which should at least be initially Marsa Matruh.

-An examination, long, accurate and serious problem requires me, with regret, to clarify my thoughts clearly, namely that this season such an operation cannot be considered prohibitive given the topographical and physical environment in which should be carried out.

Namely:

- 1) maximum of annual heat;
- 2) very little water;
- 3) only direction of travel is between the sea and the desert;
- 4) consequent impossibility to maneuver in the strategic field and very limited in that tactical (all large units are missing completely their baggage trains);
- 5) important to put national masses to motorized movement resulting in huge water consumption aggravated by lack of transport and the scorching heat.

In my opinion, therefore, an action can be only implemented (while always presenting serious difficulties) at the end of the hot season, which begins in Marmarica in late October are at your disposal, your Excellency, to go to Rome to give all those further explanations you will feel appropriate, if I believe

GRAZIANI

COMANDO SUPREMO
THE CHIEF OF THE G.S. GENERAL

NOTE FOR IL DUCE

Before the Armistice with France the Libya situation was delicate, as we were forced to assume-self-evident inferiority regarding means and strictly defensive attitude organization.

The Armistice intervened, the situation changed radically. The same day, 25 June, I wrote to the late Balbo ordering him to intensify the preparation to the eastern frontier with the concept of having first time closed the door of the House and to act over it at the same time took the matter in hand directly on the issue of transport-after the Declaration of war-had been interrupted.

The 28th - clarified the situation in Tunisia- I ordered Comando Superiore I.N.A. to make the primary front to the east.; consider the 5th Army the supply depot of the 10th; to speed up preparations to be ready to launch an offensive for the July 15.

Graziani replaced Balbo, the first telegraph (July 3): "Duce, I order say that it is in the vital interest Italy that you are ready to launch offensive on the 15th".

Meanwhile transport intensified. Still considering for the convoy still coming-to Libya were later assigned transport, medium tanks, mobile anti-aircraft batteries, guns, rifles, munitions, artillery and gunner for small arms, vehicles and motorcycles, fuels and lubricants, food, equipment, water tanks, medicine, employing 6 torpedo boats, 4 submarines, minelayers,. 22 steamships, 84 transport aircraft.

On the 13th Graziani replied: "I would like to inform you that the 15th movement across borders with Sollum" and asked occupation: "confirm start date bearing in mind that medium tanks will arrive only tomorrow night in Tobruk and after tomorrow start work."

The same day he was answered: "operations start date was given as principle; You begin operations when you will feel appropriate; In conclusion you have complete freedom of action". And the day after (14) such communications were confirmed in your name: "Duce authorizes you to delay noted operation until you have all the means that allow you to perform a maneuver to outreach and deep so

achieve significant results. Conquer Sollum and then stop is not a profitable operation and therefore not to be carried out.

In this telegram Graziani answered (day 15) explaining why he wanted to perform the action on Sollum and concluding: "taking into account as Commander he communicates a pause for action now."

On the same day-by means of telegraph - I communicated to Graziani the state and forecasts for shipments of materials and adding: "I think you will be able to launch the attack with strategic objective between 3 and 4 August. This place and finally approving your considerations set out in the final considerations exposed in telegram 01/206500 remains only to decide what time interval is convenient that intercede between creating new base at Sollum and early outreach operations. The Duce to which I submitted your telegram approves that you make preliminary operation on the day you choose. Send by air news of your decisions so that I can immediately notify the Duce".

In this telegram you on the 20th was answered as follows: "I can not, I though your 1311 now set certain plans in relation to the wider operating range ... I need sufficient time and therefore the freedom of action that already granted me with your previous ".

"I never intended-I answered same day of the 20th-do not say remove but not restrict freedom of action. If I have expressed opinions of the Duce and mine is for the convenience of harmonizing actions by different sectors. You are completely free to act in the manner and time chosen ".

On the 26th I finally received the "memory concerning the Organization of forces and means in I.N.A." which was given the significant and promising work from Marshal Graziani Excellency (and that was a matter for your praise) who consider next the start of the offensive against British troops in Egypt.

In chapter B) operational directives, the Marshal said in fact quote: "I have already exposed my operational concepts of wide principle. Greater particular more details I will say at the appropriate time on the development that will take over operations for both tightly, both drew the defense from likely offenses that can be directed against us by enemy naval forces during our advance.

While waiting to complete the implementation of forces and especially of the means (subject to the arrival of the convoy from Italy), the 10th Army's all attested on the frontier with its 5 divisions. En route are the two Libyan divisions. The two forts of Tobruk and Bardia in full efficiency.

Communications between them controlled by us. Garrisoned Giarabub properly, albeit under the control, to a wide radius, of mobile "enemy forces".

The " Memorandum " of Marshal Graziani I answered with the letter that you would like to add a copy.

These, Duce, are the background of the question-that I believed here should collect and sort-and which could not be expect in any way the conclusions now Marshal Graziani in his letter No. 03/Op. the 29th current of which I have spoken on the phone this morning and here I enclose, together with a report on the "situation in the eastern frontier and its sketch", arrived at the same time.

Marshal of Italy
Chief of the General staff
BADOGLIO

GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

OPERATION ALEXANDRIA

The amount of preparation because “Operation Alexandria” can be accomplished with success, is determined by the following elements:

- 1 enemy;
- 2) terrain and season;
- 3) our forces available.

1) *ENEMY* as the news about it are partly vague, however it is ensured that British forces in Egypt were considerably increased after our entry into the war, especially with the influx of large units from Palestine and elements of Indian, New Zealanders and South Africans.

The losses incurred so far can be considered negligible. Means and weapons available, many modern: excellent especially the armored vehicles, artillery rather poor.

Training, aggressiveness and spirit: proof of this fighting has so far supported.

Aviation numerous, modern and very active.

Today, in Egyptian-Palestinian operations are from ten to twelve divisions (of which 6-7 in the Libyan-Egyptian theater) and 400 to 500 planes.

Alleged deployment as in annex sketch of 1*.

In summary:

The enemy is in full efficiency, large and well armed: is supported by permanent fortifications (Marsa Matruh and Alexandria) and is supported by a powerful and aggressive aviation.

* Annex 1 omitted. The British troops were therefore supposedly located:: the 7th Armored Div. at the border, the 4th Indian and 6th English in Sidi el-Barrani, one or two infantry divisions between Marsa Matruh and the Delta as Delta region.

2) TERRAIN AND SEASON

The terrain - open, desert, desolate-no choice or leeway: there is only a single line of operations – the coast-exposed to all offenses from the sea and from the air. The latter is particularly dangerous given the absolute impossibility of concealment and protection.

The season-undoubtedly the most inclement of year multiply the difficulties of the desert environment and logistic measures to particularly impressive and heavy duty, not to mention the exceptionally high attrition of vehicles and aircraft.

The distance from the starting point to the objectives (250 km to Marsa Matruh and 500 to Alexandria) *to motorize all forces that are taking part in the operation.*

The direction of operations, Giarabub -Siwa-Marsa Matruh, long and very harsh, consider accordingly secondary and limited performance. It can however give some help to the coast.

3) OUR FORCES AVAILABLE

The forces currently available are in annex 2*

In the eastern theater we have 7 divisions plus many elements that can reinforce (tanks and artillery primarily) from the western theater.

In a few days, with the establishment of the “Southern oasis Grouping” (General Maletti) and moving the *Sirte* Division there are 9 divisions.

In the western theater 6 divisions remain all mutilated: no antiaircraft and anti-tank artillery, tanks, vehicles and links.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS.

The existence of a single line of operation, does not allow for wide deployment of forces, having all be fed by the one narrow alley that runs. Therefore, I believe that the expeditionary force should not exceed 7 divisions currently in eastern Libya, plus the “Southern oasis Grouping” to which account the task entrusted to exploit the Giarabub -Siwa-Marsa Matruh direction.

These 7 divisions, however, already reinforced with almost all anti-tank weapons available, still need antiaircraft and medium caliber artillery because, in addition to struggling with the enemy armored vehicles,

* Omitted

they must be defended themselves from the enemy air force and exceed the fortifications of Marsa Matruh and Alexandria.

Moreover, as I have already said, they must be motorized.

In attachment 3 the calculations are recapitulated of that I think necessary in order to put the expeditionary Corps in condition for acting.

In short the problem is reduced to a few main items:

antiaircraft artilleries and of medium-caliber gun -of which we are poor;

armor-piercing ammunitions -of which particularly are felt the deficiency in the fight against the medium tanks;

water equipment -of which the necessity is much too obvious;

motor vehicles -whose requirements, that it can seem excessive from the first moment, are revealed

after the calculations hardly sufficient in order to assure the movement until to Alexandria.

In conclusion:

In the situation and the season putting into effect, the operation on Alexandria is a very arduous enterprise and it demands, to have a good probability of succeeding, adapted to preparations and the greatest means availability.

Economies cannot be made especially in the area of the motor vehicles because of the strain on these -above all for the sand raised from the wind and for the heat -exceeds every logical forecast based on the experiences of other theaters of operation.

It is necessary, therefore, to be able to decide in each moment of necessary means, without of that we could be stopped in front of the enemy fortifications with 250 Km. of desert to the rear.

(Attachment 3 to the Memorandum)

GOVERNMENT GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERALSTAFF
OPERATION ALEXANDRIA
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS

A) OPERATING FORCES FOR THE COASTAL ROUTE:

7 divisions (of which 2 Libyans) grouped into 2 army corps, with troops and relative services.

B) OPERATING FORCES PER THE DESERT ROUTE

The southern oases group (equal to one reinforced Libyan division).

C) MAIN DEFICIENCIES:

Note: One supposes that all the accords of the D'Aponte report dated 5 July 01610/343 of protocols was completely accomplished.

1) *Antiaircraft Artilleries* -total availability:

6 groups: 2 of 75/27 CK (8 bty. in total);
 2 of 75/46 (on 3 bty. each);
 1 of 88 (on 3 bty. each).

Thought necessary to equip each Army corps and each division with *at least* one group, still need 5 modern groups (75/46 or 88) -*it* is necessary to complete with personal, motor vehicles and issue ammunitions.

2) *Artilleries of medium-caliber gun*: we do not have the 6 groups of 105/28 (one cannot think of the use of certain pieces of 149/35

Thought necessary *at least* one group of 149/13 per division, requiring of 7 groups of 149/13 -with complete personnel, motor vehicles and equipments of ammunitions. Better if there could be had adequate modern heavy field artillery.

3) *Armor-piercing ammunitions*.

The requests made by General D'Aponte have been received in minimal part:

for the guns of 20: 90,000 of the demanded 2,000,000 -granting more of the monthly production (40 -:- 50,000): in order to cover entire the requirements it would be necessary the production of 38 -:-40 months;

for the 65/17: requested 100,000 rounds -granted 3,600;

for the 47/32: requested 200,000 rounds -not being told anything, must be thought all will be granted, but he does not know when.

The above said requests are to be considered a minimum, hardly sufficient for the bores of 20 and 65/17 -while they are not at all for pieces of 47/32.

And indeed:

for 20 -pieces 220 -2,000,000 rounds 9,000 per piece;

for 47/32 -pieces 150 -200,000 rounds 1,300 per piece;

for 65/17 -pieces 87 -100,000 rounds 1,150 per piece.

Since quantities of pieces from 47/32 will go up to 200 by effect of previewed dispatched in the foretold report, the equipment will quickly reduce to 1,000 rounds per piece.

It at least must double: I request therefore another 100,000 armor-piercing rounds.

4) *Water equipment* -Based on the quartermaster calculations, there are still necessary, beyond the means promised:

-600 metallic tanks of 1,250 liters;

-if possible, another tanker.

Most useful would be also a water company, in formation even reduced, so as to be able to give one for each army Corps (currently we have only two).

5) *Motor vehicles*.

The actual availability of efficient trucks in eastern Libya is about 2,500 (of which 216 tankers and others used after the water service).

Adding the 700 you promised with the above cited report, one arrives at 3,200 trucks (inclusive of tankers).

From western Libya and Saharan Libyan -that they have little more in total than 800 heavy and light trucks between them -very little will be able to still be drawn: calculation to a *maximum* of 800 trucks.

Most remarkable it is the number of those in repair: in the western Libya alone more than 1,400.

The yield of the workshops, for pushed as to the maximum, hardly enough to compensate for the *normal* strain.

So that, in the final analysis, it cannot be counted that on a force of 3,500 trucks, including tankers. According to the calculations of quartermaster (attachment A and B) they are totally necessary:

-for the 7 divisions 7,700 heavy trucks;

-for the southern oases grouping 1,000 heavy trucks;

total 8,700

deducting from that those available 3,500

the requirements of 5,200 heavy trucks are had.

Notice that there has been no considered the antiaircraft and heavy field artilleries demands in the present attachment in the understanding that the arrival of suitable motor vehicles.

Quantitative the aforesaid heavy trucks could be diminished either by reducing the number of major units to motorized, or by diminishing the equipments to them and those en route.

In the first case we could be found to having to support a battle with forces inferior to those enemies, supported by fortifications.

In the second case, remarkable the lessening of logistic autonomy of the expeditionary corps, could render it impossible to carry out the operation for insufficiency of supplies or their timely unavailability.

GOVERNMENT GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

A) COASTAL LINE OF OPERATIONS
MOTOR VEHICLE AND FUELS REQUIREMENTS

1) *Element base of the study:*

- force 75,000 men (of which 13,000 Libyans) organized in 3 army corps with 7 divisions and troops and relative services;
- goal to reach: Alexandria (500 km. from the line of departure);
- resources along the distance: none.

2) *Criteria followed:*

- a) to assign to the transport of the troops, on the same trucks:
 - 3 days of dried provisions, comprising the organic equipment;
 - 1 unfoc, beyond the unit equipments;
 - 2 days of water (5 liters to the day);
 - fuel for the routes covered;
- b) holding ready en route two refueling for all the convoy; fuels only for tanks (200) tractors (216) and motors vehicle (400).

3) *Account of the heavy motor vehicles (Lancia Ro) being necessary.*

a) *unitary data:*

1 daily consumption of dry rations with wine for 10,000 men =	heavy trucks	4
1 daily consumption ordinary rations for 10,000 men =	heavy trucks	10
1 unfoc for one division =	heavy trucks	45
1 unfoc for troops and services of C.d'A. =	heavy trucks	<u>40</u>

b) *For the transport of major units:*

7 divisions (600 per division) =	heavy trucks	4,200
troops and service of 3 Corps =	heavy trucks	<u>800</u>
	total	5.000

c) for the continuation supply of the units:

1 daily rations consumption to dry with wine =	heavy trucks 30
1 unfoc for 7 div. and troops & serv. Of 3 Corps =	heavy trucks <u>435</u>
	total 465

d) *for equipments already en route to move:*

2 unfoc =	heavy trucks 950
2 ordinary daily rations =	heavy trucks 75
2 days water consumptions (600 jerry cans give 1,250 l.) =	heavy trucks 300

fuels to the continuation (for only tanks, tractors and motors vehicle)

heavy trucks <u>10</u>
total <u>1,335</u>

e) *Recapitulate:*

for major unit =	heavy trucks 5,000
for carrying supplies to the units =	heavy trucks 465
continuation for equipments en route =	heavy trucks <u>1,335</u>
reserve 20% (calculated on 4,500)	heavy trucks 900
	total heavy trucks <u>7,700</u>

4) *Petroleum oil and lubricants being necessary.*

The existence being put into effect is for 2 months of reported sufficiency for 3,000 motor vehicles.

In order to allow arrival of the trucks now unchanged demands, it is necessary for a further an allocation of 10,000 tons of fuel and corresponding lubricant amounts.

B) *DESERT LINE OF OPERATIONS*

MOTOR VEHICLES REQUIREMENTS

1) *base elements of the study:*

- force 8,500 men (of which 6,000 Libyans) with 1,500 camels and 300 mules, organizes in a group, equal to one division reinforced with tanks and tank destroyer artilleries and antiaircraft;
- goal to reach: Siwa and then Marsa Matruh (to approximately 500 km. from the line of departure);

- line of departure: already organized;
- resources along the distance: none.

2) *Criteria followed:* transport in the wake of the troops:

- 8 days of provisions, forage and water;
- 3 unfoc;
- 8 days of fuels (to 100 km. day-motor vehicle),

3) *Calculus of the heavy motor vehicles being necessary:*

-for transport of the units	heavy trucks	500
-for transport provisions (8 days)	heavy trucks	45
-for transport forages (8 days)	heavy trucks	30
-for transport water (8 days)	heavy trucks	100
-for transport ammunitions (3 unfoc)	heavy trucks	100
-for transport fuels (8 days)	heavy trucks	70
-supply 15%	heavy trucks	<u>135</u>
	total heavy trucks	1,000

GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES FF. AA. NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

MEMORANDUM CIRCA EGYPT OFFENSIVE ACTION

PRECEDENTS

1) The attack on Egypt has been always thought impracticable except in cases of most special circumstance, as well as from the Joint Chief of Staff from the Superesercito. All the documents on the actions of the General Staff prove it.

2) Not only but when Armed forces Comando Superiore FF AA. N.A. always represented the organizational deficiencies of the Eastern Frontier was object of the English offensive was not possible towards the Cyrenaica, for that between Marsa Matruh and Sollum 250 km. of the most barren desert existed.

The inverse reasoning is therefore reasonable for us and makes the basis of our offensive hypothesis.

3) Our question now: has the fall of France has modified the preexisting unfavorable conditions?

It can be answered affirmatively as far as the availability of the troops, and of the means that have been transferred from the West to the east to which have joined and those that are going to be adding as they arrive from the Motherland.

But it is equally exact that the physical conditions of the operating atmosphere remain identical, sharpened by the fact that has found us in the period of the maximum heat in desert area and derives from every very insufficient resource let alone of water resources.

4) And be it always considered the fundamental hinge of the war that a General does not have to move his Army when climatic conditions exist that are more than adverse. Mainly this aphorism is exact in the colonial war in torrid zone where the logistic problem and especially that of water rises to importance that exceeds every other term of the problem. It must remind that the greatest disasters in the colonial wars of all the nations are recorded for the thirst that are the fatal and fatal mirage of anyone who is penetrated in a torrid and desert territory. With regard to this it is sufficient to remember the maximum cure that during the operations against the guerrillas it was demanded by the Comandi Superiori and posted for those inferiors for assurance of the water.

For to have marched for years at the head of columns in the desert I know from personal experience the significance of water.

It can be two days without eating or nearly, but not an average day without drinking. The trained and courageous troop can be destroyed by a water crisis.

5) In the specific case the problem becomes more serious because to move masses of several tens of thousands of nationals by truck. Therefore a twofold water necessity: for the men and for the machines that will amount to about a thousand.

For against total lack along the route of march the places of water origin and the means for transporting them to the continuation of troops. In our territory the quantitative of water available between Bardia and Tobruk is of approximately one thousand two hundred m³ every day insufficient adequate amount and quality to feeding the troops in the current situation of stasis.

The water resources of Sollum, Sidi Barrani and Marsa Matruh are correctly ignored with by thinking that the retiring English will blow up the systems and salt that is pollute the pools.

The tankers of which the Expeditionary Corps has at its disposal today are 216, capacity of approximately two hundred seventy m³ of water. The means just now sent (reservoirs etc), if they increase the quantitative of water for the continuation of the troops, but diminish the number of the motor vehicles available because it must be truck borne.

We know that the General Staff has put considerable effort sending to us these means and the Comando Superiore Armed Forces N.A. hesitate to make further demands. Then it is impotent to adapt the means to the goal.

But the goal of the Expeditionary Corps of N.A. it is proposed and it had to reach cannot be that total. To reach Alexandria in Egypt and that is to in excess of 500 km. that separate the Cyrenaica border from that very important objective for our Mediterranean war. Then how to reach them given to the terms of the problem which have been concealed?

I place the following and basic elements:

a) the existing troops are sufficient, indeed they would be exuberant if a prudent measure did not advise to still maintain the Div. existing in Tripolitania, for as by now lacking nearly all arms and equipment.

b) For as, the results of the studies being and relative calculates, the motor vehicles necessary in order to auto-transport the seven existing divisions and the southern Oases group would be approximately 8,700, as it appears from the calculation completed by the General Staff of the Sup. Command, with agreement of the X Army and with the other commands of the single divisions, they are not sufficient, I do not think having to ask more satisfied after the previous demand for the thousands for which there have started the first four hundred. That since the task to put it into effect the maximum the maneuver of means.

c) I do not question the artillery means but some of it rectifies little relief, (it is necessary in fact to consider that on reaching Marsa Matruh the artillery will be necessary in order over come and to clear that entrenched field that turns out very fortified with good works and armaments) nor of medium tanks, knowing what is the requirements of the metropolitan army.

d) Consider for against necessary indeed indispensability to have at the moment of advance a wide superiority of the air force that will have to counter-battery the enemy naval attacks on my left seaward flank, completely uncovered (unless that tasks is to be done by our fleet), but however also in this case and at the same time to complete all the ground attacks necessary in order to accompany the troops that will have to march on the only route and therefore to assume a depth of some tens of km. on the road entirely lacking in shelter from view.

e) Finally the supreme and essential condition I place and that one not to move before the goal of the great heat that I judge the main obstacle and enemy for the said reasons.

f) While the organization is now hardly completed, indeed in by the fulfillment, will be perfected and the Comando Superiore is in putting via into effect contingent provisions actions to modify and that they will sure modify the conditions they created for the beginning of the campaign; and moreover the studies the possibility of the occupation of the Oasis of Siwa that will be able to constitute a thorn in the very dangerous flank for the enemy.

And in short a campaign of colonial war of the maximum entity and importance that Comando Superiore Armed forces N.A. hardly now can begin to carry out in organic way and on based on elements of fact that the contingency can find from one day to the other; not an attack to hurl pure and simply which it could conceive and effect in a already organized metropolitan front on the particular minute, as it had been on the western alpine front and could be on the eastern. The placing of this campaign is very important for the Motherland, and it is not to me to specify the damage of a defeat that when once in desert area is always total and irremediable.

GRAZIANI

In flight from Benghazi, to Rome the morning of the 5 August 1940-XVIII

Memorandum read by S.E. Graziani, I presented, the Duce.

I at once contested the exactitude of n.1. Saying that I always have been contrary to an offensive towards the east while we had

the French threat to the west. That I have never pointed out the land difficulties.

It is finally after various digressions concluded:

1) The offensive from Giarabub towards the north (Maletti) to abolish English places on our border;

2) The offensive to the north of the embankment of Sollum, and if the operation takes a good turn action until to Barrani.

BADOGLIO

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMANDERS OF THE ARMY, OF THE
ARMY CORPS, OF THE AIR FLEET, AND OF THE QUARTERMASTER CALLED BY
THE SUPREME COMMANDER ARMED FORCES N.A.

On The Day of 18 August 1940-XVIII
For The Examination of The Possibilities Operations

Present:

Eccell. gen. designate of the army I. GARIBOLDI.

Eccell. gen. designate of the army M. BERTI.

Eccell. gen. of the air Fleet F. PORRO.

Eccell. gen. of corps d'Army G. TELLERA.

Eccell. gen. of corps d'Army R. DALMAZZO.

Eccell. gen. of corps d'Army S. GALLINA.

General of division C.A. E. Pitassi.

General of division C.A. A. Bergonzoli.

General of division C.A. E. Giordano.

1. ENEMY SITUATION: see enclose sketches

2. AMOUNTS OF TROOPS

a) *Infantry*: exuberant .

b) *Artillery*: sufficient (comprising the equipment assigned to you from western Libya and Italy).

c) *Mechanics Means*: inferiors in number and quality to those of the enemy, except the M tanks suitable to their tasks, but still deficient of means of transport, means of communication and repair; on the whole insufficient technical organization of the units.

It is provided to obviate with expedient arrangements of the antitank arms, artillery etc.

3. MORAL OF THE TROOPS

Optimal under each aspect for spirit of sacrifice, desire to face the fight, confidence in the Leaders.

4. TERRAIN

It lends itself to the action in nearly all the directions, but always at great distances.

The desert character, more and more broken always towards the east.

Practicable communications for troops on foot: some limitation for the motor vehicles outside of the tracks.

Prohibitive element: the embankment, with few and not always passable passages.

No possibility of cover from aviation.

The appearing flatness of the land, dates the wide waves, can render surprise on part of small units, especially rapid possible. With the wind, for clouds of dust raised easy disorientation. In the coastal strip, at the feet of the embankment from Sollum to east, only mediocre communication (until to Sidi Barrani); land before difficult, often prohibitive for motor vehicles, laborious for troops on foot: conditions that render the march of unit with the sea to north and the desert to south painful.

5. CLIMATE

Torrid in the period July-September (reaches 50°) with the consequent provisions for the life of the troops (men and machine). In the September the heat is aggravated by the humidity and the *ghibli*.

In October the temperature diminishes until it becomes really cold later on.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

Good but the roadway only until the border; track in not good conditions until Marsa Matruh, from where it is accompanied also by a railroad until Alexandria.

7. RESOURCES

None of any kind. To emphasize the absolute absence of water

8. MEANS OF TRANSPORT (1)

Each division on average for living and the daily operating activity needs of 220 trucks.

Analogous the commands of

(1) The computation of means is made holding present the eventuality that in order to execute actions of movement or maneuver, to pass over, substitutions etc can become necessary to move at the same time - truck borne - all the units of eastern Libya.

Army corps (XXI and XXIII) have need of 220 trucks each, for the troops disposition and in order to eventually reinforce the attack of the same divisions.

XXII Army corps: has need of 80 trucks (at present in the fortress of Tobruk).

Fortress of Tobruk (54 km. of advancement): 80 trucks.

Bardia (36 km. of advancement): 50 trucks.

Troops and services of the Army: in total 200 motor vehicles.

The Maletti Group: 160 trucks.

Reserve of the Comando Superiore (61st "Sirte" Inf. Div. - 2nd CC.NN. "28 October" Militia Div.- 10th Corps Artillery Regt. and minor units): 150 trucks.

Total operating units: 2700.

Quartermaster Services (from Benghazi towards the east) for unit supply, constitution supply etc.: 1,000 trucks. Note that the subsidy transports via sea from Benghazi towards the east will be considerably diminishing with the worsening of the conditions of the sea, obligating to increase the transport via land. Some of them ensue that the amount of the trucks being necessary for the normal life in the current situation is 3,700 trucks. Currently there are 3,787 serviceable trucks existing in Cyrenaica. Therefore the existence closely is adapted to the requirements of the troops stationed for normal life and the activity of the quick columns of the frontier divisions.

It is yet to hold account of the daily strain, currently superior to the recovery of the workshops; difference that stretches to improve, but without ever being able to make up the balance.

In case of operations, the requirements of motor vehicles would increase in the measure already indicated in the memorandum compiled for offensive operations "A" from the General Staff of the Comando Superiore Armed Forces. In the about suitable figures do not keep account of the strains, of the losses provoked by the enemy action and of the imbalance that will come to be produced between the greater number of trucks in circulation and yield of the workshops.

9. STOCKPILES

Essential conditions because can be operated with tranquility is the assurance of having to capacity the supplies being necessary for living and fighting.

If this is true in kind for all the supplies it is essential in our case for the water, ammunitions, fuel and provisions.

Water. No difficulty as far as the equipment of two days from departure; possible the normal supplying of approximately 60,000 men and relative machines from Bardia and, if necessary, from Tobruk.

Ammunitions. It is thought necessary at the beginning of an operation to have to disposition in Cyrenaica, opportunely located, the unfoc already concerted between the Royal Army General Staff, and the quartermaster general, and that is:

14 unfoc for all mobile artilleries (excluded therefore those of the G.a.F.);

15 unfoc for the arms of the infantry;

6 unfoc for hand grenades

Currently there exist:

Bardia: 3½ unfoc for 5 divisions (of which two Libyans);

Tobruk: the 2 unfoc for all units of Cyrenaica.

With the arrivals and the demands in course it is hoped to reach in principle the requirements indicated for all the types of arms and guns, to exception of the noted armor-piercing rounds of 20, 47 and 65 mm.

Fuel. For the normal consumptions of the existing motor vehicles it is today had 9,000 t. of benzene sufficient for three months and 3,300 t. of diesel oil sufficient for a month approximately.

In case of operations, employing the only today existing means, the sufficiency is reduced to a one-third of that indicated, precluding losses for war events.

The quartermaster thinks it indispensable, also in normal times, to always be able to constantly arrange undelivered goods lying ashore, equal to 15,000 t at least, of benzene and 15,000 of diesel oil.

Provisions. It is necessary to the quartermaster to have lying ashore and held to count all the N.A. troops of equal to the needs of Provisions for three months.

In kind the existing availabilities are sufficient but for some items, among which, mainly, that of flour, the whose availability is today of 20 days for Cyrenaica and 60 for Tripolitania; wine, is lacking, and other commodities of minor relief.

10. AVIATION

The situation of the Air Force is sufficient for the operating necessities of the current period.

In the case of the previewed action and an eventual prolonging of it in the time and the space, it is necessary to assure the mastery of the sky, not only for a few hours of the day and in some narrow localities, but for the entire day and on all the fronts of the battle.

Such dominion is then indispensable in case the developments of the operation to carry the divisions restricted to only the Sollum-Sidi Barrani road.

As minimum, because the V Air Fleet can give with means of the various specialties the necessary collaboration in order to assure the protection of our columns and to carry out offensive action of clear result, it is necessary before the beginning of the operation:

a) to assign to a third wing of fighters to accomplish (1);

(1) 12 hours of flight; 2 flights per group; each flight an hour with the enemy.

- b) to complete the two organic units currently in Libya;
- c) to assure the complements in pilots and aircraft of the three groups during the period of the operations in order to satisfy the losses immediately;
- d) to assign for the duration of the operation two bombing groups which to entrust the operations offensive on the sea against English naval units;
- e) to complete the organic of the four fighter groups in crews and aircraft that, for the losses endured, are reduced remarkably in force;
- f) to assign to the two wings A. O. (recon) aircraft that for armament and flight characteristics allow this specialty to acquit its important task without need of the directed continuous protection;
- g) to assure the complements in pilots and aircraft of the aviation of assault, on which assignment for the attack of medium tanks and the enemy columns is largely made;
- h) to increase the number of the transport aircraft for the greater requirements deriving from a period operating in desert areas, with a minimum of a wing of S.75 or otherwise S.82 aircraft;
- i) to send ahead the number of motor vehicles necessary for the movement in of the units (150 heavy motor vehicles);
- l) to increase to the maximum the of work of the repairs or recoveries fleets;
- m) to assure the supply of the materials being necessary for the intense activity of flight and offense.

They will give to you details for last the three paragraphs will be indicated to you in the appropriate study already compiled by the 5th Air Fleet Command.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion of much said above, unanimity we assert that in the conditions of a worthy offensive of this name put into effect is not possible, but to only carry out small tending operations to maintain prestige over the enemy, in order to mark the dominion on him.

To the question placed by his Excellency the Comandante Superiore, and that is "which organism would turn out constituted in a total way, concentrating all means in favor of sure a number of divisions, always excluded the O.M. requirements, and that is how many complete divisions could all be put in motion, placed side by side with all mechanizes means and artilleries available" we think that:

1) in consideration of how much it has been tried by me to compute the means necessary to the normal life regarding those existing (difference in more than 80 trucks) and subsisting the operating location and necessities to put them into effect, the constitution of a completely motorized G. U. is not possible ;

2) modifying location and abating the operational necessities (mobile columns, detachments, etc.) a number of such motor vehicles certainly could be recovered to motorize to the maximum a Army corps of two divisions and the planned armored column, also guaranteeing the requirements for the O. M. grouping

The quartermaster feels on this purpose that the almost suitable units (Army Corps & armored column) could only move after that the necessary equipments near the lines of departure were constituted.

GARIBOLDI

(follows Attached 23)

MARSHAL OF ITALY
RODOLFO GRAZIANI
Cirene, 18 August 1940 XVIII
04/Op.

To His Excellency the Chief of General Staff - Rome.

The day of 11 August, as soon as return to Benghazi, in a staff meeting, and in which participated the Commander of the 10th Army Excellency Berti, the General of the Army designate, Commander of the 5th Army, Excellency Gariboldi, General Giordano Quartermaster, the Ecc. Porro Commander of Aero-Libya; they are exposed the outcomes of the conversations I had in Rome and: "take the decision to operate as soon as possible, in the narrow range with the objective of just Sidi el Barrani" the directives received from his Excellence the Chief of the General Staff on 5 August at the Venice Palace, and you confirmed to me the next day the 6th at the Palace of the Ricerche.

The inflow of means from the West being by now completed, and finished also the unloading of those it sent to you from Italy by means of convoy, I had yesterday a meeting in Cirene with the Commander of the 10th Army, the Aero-Libya Commander, the Commanders of all the Army corps and quartermaster General and have placed on the carpet for execution, the operating topic at question.

It is not the unanimous opinion of all summoned person, among which there figure men of various temperament, but all commanders of first order, try and proven in peace and in war, it has been unanimously and decidedly contrary to each possibility of offensive action also it is reduced to the limit indicated by you, in control of the enemy located from Sidi el-Barrani to Sollum (much different from that one of 15 July), but above all by the persistent the insufficiency of means of transport at our disposition (also to due to the inclemency of the season and the extreme sparsely of water).

On the front to the opinion of the men responsible and of unsuspected patriotic and war spirit, as well as of the highest experienced technical ability in war, to me it is not remained to ask, after meticulous and exhausting conflicting argument, the putting to report of the arguments giving you the relative conclusions.

Of the copy of the meeting record originates signed from all those present.

Given the situation that emerges and at the front by my personal impotence to overcome the deficiency of means, while many expectations feed from the higher hierarchies and in the Motherland, for resolute action of short duration on this front, the painful tasks imposed on me:

1) or to receive of the directives of action adapted to the state of the described facts, that remove me and all the other commanders from a very painful uncertainty for soldiers who in all their life have given with extreme usury each audacity when this could appear to herald victory;

2) or a higher inspection that it directly judges in the merit of how much in the report is sanctioned.

And finally obvious and right for me, in such a contingency, to put my person to complete disposition of the Supreme Authorities, in case this can be thought useful.

The Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
R. Graziani

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
MARSHAL OF ITALY
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

N. 07/Op.

Benghazi, 23 August 1940-XVIII

His Excellency the Chief of General Staff, General - Rome.

I have received telegram 1990-1991-1992 Op. affirmed by the Duce intercrossed with my report 04/Op. of 18 August with the annexed report of the meeting of same the day - carried to Rome by the personnel of the Royal Carabineer Service.

To telegram 1990-1991-1992 Op. I have answered with my 3031 Op. (that it turns out delivered by me to the Stamage at 10:30 hours of 20 August) assuring that the orders contained in it will be executed.

The Same day the 20th I was given the orders contained in *attachment n.1* to His Excellency the commander of the 10th Army in the attempt to introduced to me a concrete disposition of maneuver (n. 05/Op. of 20 August 1940).

Some of them I have instead had contained the intricate and indefinite answer in *attachment n. 2* (n. 01/6684 Op. of 21 August).

It was not this that I had to attend to an commander army which seemed to want to bring back the things in the field to the already exhausted argument with the report of the 18th.

I have then written up the operations order n.06 of 22 August (*attachment n. 3*) that the commander of the 10th Army has received this morning of 23 August. (You see the map of Cyrenaica to the 400,000).

I have reason believe that no other exceptions will be placed by him, While I have received on the 21st the telegram 2036 Op. of Duce (*attachment n. 4 **).

This evening I had a long conference on the air topic with His Excellency Porro and the Undersecretary of General Staff of the R. A. returning from his inspection tour.

In aviation in fact we at all do not have *superiority on the enemy and not even parity*.

*Omitted.

It is superfluous for me to repeat that an action of the troops in the land of frontier towards enemy territory will be hammered from the first moment by enemy aviation, *that it is absolutely necessary to put in conditions for concealing or for inferiority if take that the march on land can proceed ahead it is with clearly reduced objectives therefore.*

Because this occurrence is necessary:

- 1) To send the means that are lacking;
- 2) not to engage even an aircraft for the days of the movement for actions that are not *on the ground*, in aid of the troops.

Premised and made note over how much, delivery tomorrow in order to establish to me in Tobruk and you to watch directly the prepared relative to you, attending there for that further command communications via the day of beginning of the action.

The Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

Appendix 24/1

GOVERNMENT GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 05/Op.

Benghazi, 20 August 1940-XVIII 09:35 Hours

To His Excellency the Commander the 10th Army - Military mail.

As I clearly previewed and enunciated in the meet of the 18th, the Duce, with the telegram of the 19th reaching stamane, fixed the orders to begin the attack against the English troops that defend to the frontier the territory Egyptian.

No prefixed limit and territorial object to you to reach.

It determines instead in a compulsory way that the beginning of the movement coincides with that of the German land offensive in England which can be between seven and twenty days hence.

In consequence it must at once determine the start of our forward movement.

The troops of Army are at your complete disposition plus the Libyan divisions group. Keep in mind this same morning I have sent to Rome a copy of the report of the 18th that determines the availability of means and consequently the operating reality.

Very soon I will settle down to Tobruk where you will submit to me your conclusions subject to my approval.

Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
Marshal of Italy
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

Appendix 24/2

COMMANDER 10th ARMY
OFFICE OF THE GENERAL STAFF - TACTICAL COMMAND

N. 01/6684

21 August 1940-XVIII

Object: Directives. - Answer to sheet 05 Op. of 20 August c. y.

To His Excellency the Marshal of Italy Rodolfo Graziani - Benghazi.

The situation put into effect, as is noted:

- XXI Army Corps is in conditions for moving and for acting offensively, with the infantry on foot, but in range limited for impossibility to supply with its means of transport of all arms and ammunitions and to supply of the fortress of Bardia;
- XXII Army Corps is not in conditions for moving since its divisions lack means of transport;
- XXIII Army Corps lacks its army corps troops and means of transport. Its divisions have respective 190 and 80 motor vehicles;
- the Gallina group has a rich equipment of trucks, can move with the infantry on foot, but with insufficient supply given the route to cover;
- the possibilities of the quartermaster are not known.

Given the land, the enemy, the conditions of which over and the provisions that will be able to be put into effect, the line that would be possible to reach with our offensive action beyond border goes from a minimum - the embankment of Sollum - to a maximum - meridian of Sidi el Barrani.

With that the extreme exceptionally unfavorable or favorable hypotheses are not considered.

According to the situation first the enemy and ours and of the nearby provisions, objectives he could reach, or with only the divisions of the XXI army corps, or with the troops of the XXI and XXIII Corps, or with the previous and the Gallina group.

The provisions to take in either case:

1) Give to the army an air force reconnaissance which today is not existing. The motorized combat is carried out with such rapidity in this land that the commander has need of being informed at once of what happens for him to be able to take part timely and effectively.

2) Completion of the air force. To the army is interested, in particular, in protection and in assault. The former, since in this flat land and uncovered to enemy aviation - if not hindered - he can obtain decisive results against the troops marching to battle.

The later since we must be prevented the enemy armor units, fighting against units in great part in trucks or on foot, they can complete an attack in mass compact.

Provisions to take in relation to your objective that they wanted you to reach and to the troops that you intend to employ:

1) Completion of the command and the troops of the XXIII army corps and of the Libyan divisions group command, as in the sheet 03/2395 of the 15th current.

2) Provisions of organic character, logistic and training of as per the same sheet.

3) Completion until to a maximum of 400 motor vehicles per division (200 heavy and 200 light) with the infantries on foot reduced to 4 bns. and carrying to the continuation of units 2 "unfoc".

4) Supply entrusted to the Quartermaster until the supply sections, health and D.A.M. places of army corps.

5) Entrusted water service to the Quartermaster .

6) Data on the location, situation and tasks of the Gallina group, to consider its complete motorization.

Commanding General
M. Berti

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 06/Op.

Benghazi, 22 August XVII

Answer to sheet 01/6684 of the 21st c. m.

Subject: Directives for the offensive.

To His Excellency the Commander the 10th Army - P. M.

and, for information:

To His Excellency the Commander the V Air Fleet - P. M.

To Quartermaster General, - P. M.

In uniform with the account of much I have communicated to you with my 05/Op. - and that is to say that, however, we must be ready to move offensively to leave from the 27th current - and having taken acquaintance of the conclusions exposed in your sheet 01/6684 - I establish:

1) *The objective assigned in primary now to the army is the embankment of Sollum until the height of Suani el Augerin.*

2) Initially Forces destined to the attack:

a) XXI army corps with three divisions (*Cirene, Marmarica* and 1st *Camicie Nere*);

b) The Libyan divisions group reinforced with part of the II tank battalion M at the disposition of this High command and with the 105/28 group from the XXII army corps - besides those other anti-tank and antiaircraft means that you will think opportune allot to him.

3) *Directions for attack:*

XXI army corps: Capuzzo-Sollum and Ghirba-Gabr bu Fares Suani el Areighib;

Libyan divisions Group: Gabr Saleh-Sceferzen-Bir Chreigat Suani el Augerin.

Since is probable that much greater resistance will be opposite from the enemy forces located between Gabr bu Fares and Bir el Chreigat, is of the maximum importance that the right wing of the army is very strong in means of fire and anti-tank.

Strategic aerial exploration: provide the Comando Superiore with means at disposition; that command is requested to signal the zones to explore and the objectives to hold timely under control.

5) *Co-Operation of the aviation*: it will be granted if possible the largest measure: the commander you specify to me, where, when and as.

6) *Supplying*: entrusted to the Quartermaster until the subsistence sections and D.A.M. places of the army corps.

7) *water Service*: entrusted to the Quartermaster.

8) *Provisions of various organic and logistic character*: it is being provided with the greatest possible allowed width from the limited availabilities; it remains, but, meant that the eventual deficiencies in this field do not have at all to delay the beginning and the development of the operations.

9) *Preparations for the attack*: they must begin immediately - in case they were not already - and be developed with the maximum quickness.

Of particular importance:

a) to become masters of the land interposed between Capuzzo-Sidi Azeiz and Gabr Saleh, as ordered with my 01/277440 of the 19th current so as to eliminate every motorized enemy infiltration means;

b) to push reconnaissance towards Ghirba-Sidi Omar and Sceferzen in order to test enemy resistance and, if possible, to determine the advanced placement of the enemy forces;

c) to occupy with a strong detachment the land between Marsa er Ramla and Capuzzo.

10) You well comprehend that if the enemy accepts battle, engaging the mass of its forces between Bir Chreigat and Gabr bu Fares our deployment allows the most favorable developments: in fact, we can at the occurrence concentrate to the right wing a preponderant forces, above all in artillery.

I do not exclude the participation of the 4th Camicie Nere division that, therefore, will have to make itself ready to take part.

For the eventual transport means for it to provide trucks to this Comando Superiore: to such need the Quartermaster will set aside at Tobruk 300 trucks, intangible reserves at my disposition.

11) In order to guard the secret it is necessary to *reduce to a minimum*, in these days, *all the traffic radio*.

I think it is totally superfluous to add that I can count on the widest cooperation from all - commands, troops and services - since every difficulty is old and every sacrifice serenely faced in order to reach the inevitable victory.

Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
The Marshal of Italia
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND FF. AA. NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 0/10 of prot. Op.

25 August 1940

Subject: Directives.

To His Ecc. the Commander of the 10th Army - Military Mail.
and, for information:
To His Ecc. the Commander of the V Air Fleet - Military Mail.
To Quartermaster General - Military Mail.

Taken action of your second sheets 01/6776 of 24 August and 6350 of the 25th (1), As it determines the directives to follows for the action carried out.

A) 5 divisions are sufficient for the action:

Group on the left:

2 in the forward formation (63rd "Cirene " and 62nd " Marmarica");

1 in reserve ("23 Marzo");

(only 1 Commander to designate: I will appoint him).

Group on the right:

Libyan divisions group reinforced in the maximum measure of artillery, medium tanks, light tanks, 47 mm. and 20 mm. guns;

maximum autonomy of provisions, ammunitions, water, maximum number of motor vehicles.

Maletti Battle group under my direct command for particular assignments that I will determine at the opportune moment

B) 1st tempo of the maneuver.

X-Day, the 1st Libyan closes with the 2nd and subsequently the divisions group waits on the Sidi Omar-Sceferzen front.

Movement to be complete in limits of time adapted to the necessity of the motor vehicles available or on foot and to according to the circumstances of march (based on three days).

While the Libyan divisions complete the movements for consolidation, motorized columns of important force formed from the left group must protect the left flank.

1) Said sheets do not figure among the attachments to the diary of the Comando Superiore N. A. and not even among the attachments to the report of General Berti.

To the protection on the right of the Libyan divisions group will have to be supplied from - their own means - and is essentially for this that it will have an endowment of artilleries, etc as I have said, in adequate measure.

On X-Day + 1 of the movement of the Libyans the two metropolitan divisions first formation will begin their movement and they will wait in the Capuzzo-Ghirba frontier, to close the possible void with the Libyan divisions group.

2nd phase of maneuver.

On X-day +... to be determined on basis to the logistical restoration, the maneuver will be begun in order to reach the objectives determined by order of Op. 06 of the 22nd.

Hinged on the left. The Wing marching with speed for the stiff maneuver to cut the enemy withdraw, on the right.

C) The Air Force will assemble according of the necessities for the protection of the left or right wing on my directed order.

D) The Quartermaster will put into effect the maneuver of means to the maximum degree.

E) The Commanders of division must march in the disposition of their own units. The Commanders of army corps to follow to close behind. The Commander of the army will incline with his presence on the left.

I reserve myself to take part where needed, but I think of better having to support the right with my material presence.

F) Look after the connections in the sense of the front and the rears.

G) Exploit the success to the maximum degree and, introduce the favorable occasion, to head for Sidi el Barrani.

A battle based and lead therefore with the maximum audacity on part of all, and with the maximum decision at the opportune moment cannot but carry to a sure victory, that faith and will on part of the commanders and followers always do not lack.

H) On the base of these directives His Ecc. the commander of the army tasks with other the relative operations orders; very soon enlighten them in meetings to which the commanders of army corps and of division will have to participate, the commander of the V Air Fleet, Quartermaster general, the Chief of the G. S., the assigned general, the operation section and services chiefs of the Comando superiore who will represent themselves. I wish to receive the very soon to copy of the operations orders that you will give.

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 01/207-914 of prot. Op.

5 September 1940-XVIII

Risp. 2308/1 Op. 4 corr.

Subject: Development of offensive operations.

To His Excellency the Chief of General Staff - Rome.

I answer categorically to several the points of your telegram 2308/1 Op. reaching me today.

The 600 motor vehicles which I referred to in my sheet 01/207.850 dated the 2nd of the current month effectively are comprised among those indicated in letter 04617/343 dated 27 August of the Army General Staff, with only the variance that, to the aims of trucking of the units, they reduce themselves in effects to 500, from the moment that the remaining listed motor vehicles constitute equipment in distribution to the organic units (antiaircraft groups, water companies, M 13 tank battalions, etc.) that are represented from special motor vehicles, which motorcars, ambulances, etc.

1) The first block of 200 trucks reached Tripoli on 2 September with the steamships *Gritti* and *Vittor Pisani*. For the ill-omened collision they endured at the entrance of the port, I have sent at once in flight to the place the Quartermaster general and thankfully his participation it has been decided that 100 of them continue via ground (being that the *Vittor Pisani* inability to move itself), while the others 100 will continue to Benghazi with the *Gritti*, since until yesterday forcing the suspension to the movement given for the Defense of the traffic.

2) The 100 Lancia 3 RO that departed today from Italy will presumably reach Tripoli the 7th current. Consider make them continue at once via sea for Benghazi, barring accidents.

3) Same with the remaining the 360 trucks previewed to arrive at Tripoli for the day of the 13th: they will continue at once via sea for Benghazi.

4) Ignore with accuracy with the cargo of the fourth group, whose arrival in N. A. is presumed before the 20th next the next one, but since all means and the equipments specified by the Army G.S in its sheet already cited 04617/343 are indispensable to the aims of the future operations account on it for the imminent needs.

From all these considerations it can be deduced the arrival of the preannounce means that or in course of arrival will come to workability only at the end of September or within the first week of October.

Conclusions.

As I have already represented with my recollected sheet 01/207.850, the current situation of means at my disposition does not allow the goal initially of the objective of Sidi el Barrani, developing the twofold maneuver of turning, then that the actual availability of motor vehicles does not allow to truck the entire Libyan divisions group, destined to act on the right.

The action would have to be limited to the occupation of the line Sollum-Halfaya-Gabr bu Fares-Bir Chreigat, where the troops would have to stop, to wait for of the inflow of the means of assuring actions the further development of the maneuver.

Such a pause, but, beyond an obligation to a onerous Internal Security Service on our right and protection of the rears, would attenuate of sure the advantages of the surprise and would allow the enemy to make to flow on the rear of the battlefield units and means, with the relative consequences.

From that, the convenience that the action is begun and developed without pauses, in full means power and with full freedom of decision until the conclusion.

Calculating that the work in progress on the Egyptian frontier of means predisposed by the G. S. could be completed, as it appears from the answer given to the movement questions, within the limits of indicated time, I think that from a closely operational point of view another would convene to defer the offensive action to the aforesaid term.

This deferment would not succeed moreover useless also to the Quartermaster, because it would allow them to set aside in the advance bases of Tobruk and Bardia the equipments that are still in great part spaced out very behind and whose forwarding meets not a little difficulties for the sparsely of motor vehicles and the precariousness of the transports via sea.

There is moreover from considering the interpretation which the beginning would lend to limit our offensive therefore in space. Sure the enemy would be induced to proclaim that it is exhausted hardly to about the border for our logistic insufficiency or, worse, for have them arrested and demolished.

For every greater clarification with regard to the bearer, of this report, General Miele,

Marshal of Italy
Comandante Superiore Armed Forces N. A.
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA

On, 7 September 1040-XVIII

3/0p. Graziani *for His Excellency Badoglio* (.) Decrypted for him (.) yours at 23:19 of the 5th current month (.) His Excellency is sorry, not to be able to accept Your resignation (.) After 18/0p. of the 2 July Past & that is of the successive day at my arrival I have asked the shipment here for a minimum of thousand motor vehicles (.) This demand I have still confirmed in the talk of 5 August past in Rome & without result left memorandum to the Duce & to You while the calculations of this General Staff determined a necessity much more greater, than motor vehicles & that is 6,000 (.) Of 1,000 demands only 400 have been sent with time established in the report 01/207914 Op. of the September current delivered to You from General Miele (.) Demanded does not have therefore no new origin from the exposed operations plan, which is of consequence of the study of all circumstances & given on practicability & on the land that exactly in two months of surveying has been able to determine with exactitude (.)

Whichever operating concept the thousand motor vehicles that is would always have been equally necessary (.)

In the vehicle report sent to General Miele newly specified the limits of consequent necessities & of the possible ones (.) Premised is that not without deep sorrow that I state of therefore being badly comprised (.) Thought the most that the precarious situation perfect acquaintance of that Command & that authorized me at a very various reason of tranquility (.) Hopes that General Miele has all cleared (.) GRAZIANI

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

Benghazi, 6 September 1940-XVIII

Duce!

The hierarchical restraints imposed by the constitution of the Comando Supremo have prohibited to me and they still prohibit me to correspond directly with You.

The exposure of my judgments in merit to serious and the important task that you have entrusted me reaches You therefore by an indirect way.

I cannot however forget that the Victory to the "south front" during the Ethiopian war was achieved because breaking off the diaphragm of the intermediaries, I headed You personally.

To me it would seem therefore guilt if you did not dare of speak to me directly as today I induce myself to do.

You are the Leader and will judge as best you believe this my action.

My person is always ready to disappear and is therefore that I find the necessary courage to do.

You in the strategic directives that you have emanated the day of 11 July say exactly: "For now, and not considering the Empire that constitutes theater of operations to if, us he does not remain but a single land frontier on which to act: the Cyrenaica.

The General Governor of Libya has received from me precise directives circa the conduct to follow. It does not remain now that to dispatch with every means all the material demands in order that it can be very soon in a position to carrying out the task entrusted to me, a task of fundamental strategic and political importance".

The special circumstances that imposed my unexpected departure from the Motherland, prevented to me however of being able to have also a simple talk, with You, Duce, and the same with the Chief of the General Staff.

Arriving I found to the eastern frontier here a such situation that under every point of view could be defined dangerous and precarious.

Absence of organization and means insufficiency.

The lowest moral in all for the feeling of the inferiority of front to the enemy.

The Comando Superiore of Armed Forces N.A. in fact had not ever thought that the English had been able to attack on the eastern front because of the absolute inhospitality of that theater of operations.

Therefore he had assigned all of the insufficient means sent from Italy to the western front, where a French offensive was thought certain.

The fall of France, also in the joy of the relief that they derived, the Command abruptly was recalled to the truth towards the eastern front where the English, Contrarily to all the forecasts made, began at once their attacks with the armored division inflicting to our troops, absolutely unable to stand one's ground for means, some serious and painful and depressing check.

To me to reach the Voice of their propaganda between aboriginal & metropolitans until Tripoli had produced a sense of panic truly remarkable and dangerous. If in those first days of hostility the English had known to dare they would have arrived surely at Tobruk, that he would have meant the breach of our weakest front, and the consequent loss of all the Cyrenaica, to in spite of the fall of France.

My first thought 1 July, hardly arrived at Tripoli, was that one to give to fixed orders since all means of the V Army were flowing towards the east winning all the reluctances and the resistances that with regard to yet be made.

But from Tripoli to Tobruk - Bardia they run approximately 200 km. of road and the motor vehicles for the transports were very insufficient.

The in flow of these means that was taken place under the eyes of all, metropolitan and aboriginal, it began to revive the spirits and to instill the confidence that was completely lost.

The first convoy from the Motherland reached Benghazi while and this increased the sense of resumption that then has gone always progressively increasing.

The Joint Chief of Staff ordered me to hold ready to attack for 15 July.

It could not ignore that the means of which I arranged could not absolutely be sufficient to complete a strategic thrust.

I limited therefore my forecasts to simple leap on Sollum and possible hinterland - operation that in that moment it would have succeeded by surprise, with certainty, and that it would have given again to our troops the feeling of the force, and removed the English threats from the threshold of our frontier.

The Joint Chief of Staff declared not profitable this operation and therefore not to effect it.

I would have had instead to send back to the first week of August, in which it was presumed that the first convoy would arrive, and to always complete a operation but with strategic thrust.

An elementary calculation of means, also made from far away, would have still had to make to think this possibility prohibitive.

My decision then, 29 July, to speak clearly and place at my disposition for greater clarifications with me to come to Italy - as You know - that happened on 5th day of August.

I could only resume the road of the return on 9 August for the prohibitive atmospheric conditions.

In a conversation had with the Chief of the General Staff the afternoon of the day of 6 August they indicated to me the date of 14 or 15 August in order to begin the operation, what was materially impossible to effect since means hardly in departure could then not have reached in time to foot the work of the operating troops even if had been sufficient, that they were not at all.

Tightened on one side from the pressures of this sort and other from the truth and consequent impotence to move, I meet the day of the 18th all the commanders of army and army corps in order to hear their opinion.

Some of them derived the report sent to Rome.

This dispatch was intercrossed with Your telegram, and since in it You asked a minimum to me and not a strategic thrust as until then it had made by the Joint Chief of Staff, I answered that Your orders would have been executed.

The callback to the truth induced however the Joint Chief of Staff to make to dispatch the rest of the means that hardly today begin to arrive.

It in fact arrived in port now does the Gritti, while the other collided with it at Tripoli is forced to disembark its cargo there.

The other steamboats awaited that are presumed cannot arrive for all if not by the end of September.

In with time to move to Tobruk to contact with the army they are successful finally to form among the commanders a state of certainty, and I have formulated a precise slow maneuver of the first phase on Sidi Barrani who I have sent for the examination to the Chief of the General Staff.

Premised how much over, Duce, I must tell you with my customary candor to which Your great and comprehensive good will authorizes to me:

1) that is very happy for having known to resist to the pressure that reached me from G. S. General, to which evidently it was escaped the grandeur of the problem that we have a long and that dangerous adventure does not absolutely authorize whatever commander to run;

2) that I think with this of have rendered a greatest service and with You to the Italian people that attends from me the miracle before, while I of utopian do not have, for my misfortune, than achieved the reputation being always my succeeded fruit of preparation and audacious action and to the bottom;

3) that the conquest of Egypt is as has said a problem to assume with the maximum seriousness and nothing at all with superficiality;

4) that the performance of a such conquest demands the most considerable means and above all in fact of motor transport and armor;

5) that those in arrival will allow us just barely to risk of being able to carry out the maneuver on Sidi Barrani, without that in the hands of the High supreme command it remains the possibility to arrange of a reserve whatever.

That is: once put in motion the organism hardly mounted or this arrives well and go well this to him at that time and the Command would not have way of defense not even withdraw or of strengthen the attack with his reserves.

He must in fact consider that we make so as to a colonial war here, but against well a armed metropolitan army and not against the Abyssinian or the English forces of the Somaliland.

To reject them a priori therefore whichever comparison with the Ethiopian war or the conquest of the English Somalia if however someone wanted or thought about to be able to make.

6) That the conduct of the campaign once in possession of all really sufficient means, cannot complete it that in the two thrust strategy more than possible drawn near in the time (in only a time if the conditions favorable will allow the):

1) The occupation of Marsa Matruh;

2) The march on Alexandria.

And it is for this necessary a calculation in depth that leads to predispose before, and to execute then with the maximum swiftness. This has always been my style.

And then I wonder: if really this plan is of first importance as You has said in Your strategic directives, since not to complete a truly worthy effort of this name and not to send here means truly necessary in order to give life to an operating body that it would all crush and sweep up once put in motion?

I compute of these means clearly is specified in the calculations remittances to the Superesercito and from which also I believed could release me, reducing the figures, for love of generous will to go encounter to the possibilities and render my account of the difficulties of the center.

But the truth is very other and it is prevailed to any various consideration and serious guilt would be for me to conceal. This campaign cannot totally be lead to the end if not with wealth of road haulages and, as You specified same in the meeting of Rome, of aviation. (Superfluous that he points out the medium armor).

The other side of the problem is necessary to examine. That western one.

In Tripolitania their remained by now five divisions lacking in means of fire and motor vehicles.

If tomorrow it convene however to send the troops into Tunisia I would not know as to make a move not even a regiment.

And it does not have to forget that seven French divisions that garrisoned it have cleared the complete line of Mareth of arms and baggage, carrying away also the fixed emplacements, since our Commission of armistice arrived in Tunisia 49 days after the date of it.

I have today sent to the West, His Excellency Gariboldi for the examination of the situation there determine as a result of all the deductions of armaments and means for the east.

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N A.
RODOLFO Graziani

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 0/29 of prot. Op.

7 September 1940-XVIII

Subject: Offensive operation on Sidi Barrani.

To Commander 10th Army
To Commander V Air Fleet
To Commander Maletti grouping
To Commander Libyan Tank Command
To General Intendente
Military Mail with 1/2 official courier

To confirmation oral orders.

1) The offensive operation on Sidi el Barrani will be begun the 9th current.

2) To modify my 0/10 Op. of 25 August, I mean to mass with all the forces on the left and to head as quickly as possible at Bug Bug and Sidi Barrani by the coastal line of operations.

3) DEPLOYMENT OF THE FORCES:

a) group Libyan divisions in the first formation, between Capuzzo and Ghirba, reinforced to the maximum with artilleries and tanks;

b) XXIII army corps in second formation between Marsa Ramla - Sidi Azeiz and Capuzzo, with the 1st cc. nn. ("23 March") division in army reserve (trucked);

c) Maletti grouping - that will remains under my directed command - initially at Sidi Omar. The will be reinforced by the M-11 tank company (now assigned to the Libyan division group) and by the VI 75/27 C. R. group (currently employed in the defense of Derna);

d) the tank commander (General Babini) passes to his disposition all means of the 10th Army, with except the units attached to the Maletti grouping.

4) DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANEUVER.

1st Phase:

- Libyan divisions group is moved from the area of Gabr Saleh-Bir Gobi on the assigned front;

- XXIII army corps, assumes the established alignment;

- in the meantime the alignment of the artilleries previewed in the area to the northeast of Capuzzo is put into effect;

- Maletti grouping moves along the route Tobruch-Bir Bobi-Gabr Saleh-Sidi Omar. The movement must begin at once.

2nd Phase:

- Libyan divisions group thrust quickly on Sollum and Halfaya and spreads in the plain projecting themselves on Bug Bug and Sidi Barrani, followed from the divisions of the XXIII army corps;

- Maletti grouping from Sidi Omar towards Gabr bu Fares for protection of the right flank of the army, ready to surge ahead in order to take advantage of every favorable occasion. It must observe especially the origins from Scerfezen and Bir Chreigat.

5) AVIATION: it will act en mass in harmonic adhesion with the action of the ground forces, always to my direct command.

1st phase:

- protection of the movements of the mass of the army in the Bardia-Sidi Azeiz-Capuzzo-Sidi Omar area ;

- it sets in action of bombing of logistics center, airfields and enemy command.

2nd phase:

- protection of the movement from Capuzzo-Ghirba-Sidi Omar on Bug Bug and beyond;

- assault against enemy troops and mechanized means;

- bombardment of objectives that I reserve myself to specify.

6) PROTECTION OF THE REAR.

It remains entrusted to the XXII army corps that it supplies to you:

- by the "Catanzaro" division, already located along the coastal strip and the Trigh Capuzzo;

- by the 4th cc. nn. division "3 January" that it will above send all to Bir Gobi and Gabr Saleh strong detachments of artilleries.

7) SERVICES. In the initial phase the Intendancy will assure the operation of the services until the town of Bardia; for the next phase reserve of orders. It in any case predisposes a trucked water reservoir to Bardia. As it is noted I do not have other motor vehicles to assign.

8) Place of command: reservoir of communications.

Receipt.

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N A.
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

COMMANDER 10th ARMY
OPERATIONS SECTION

N. 01/7351 with prot.

C. T., 8 September 1940-XVIII

Subject: Offensive operation on Sidi Barrani.

Maps: 1:1.000.000; 1:100.000.

To His Ecc. Commander XXII C.A.	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To His Ecc. Commander XXIII C.A	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To His Ecc. Commander Libyan div. group	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To Sig. General commander art. 10th Army	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To Sig. General commander Engineers 10th Army	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To Sig. Gen. commander Libya tank	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To Sig. Col. commander 4th Inf. tank rgt.	<i>C. Tattico</i>

and, for information:

To Armed forces high command FF. AA. N A.	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To His Ecc. Commando V Air Fleet	<i>C. Tattico</i>
To Sig. General Intendente N. A.	<i>C. Tattico</i>

To confirmation oral orders.

1) the offensive operation on Sidi el Barrani will begun the 9th current.
2) To modify my 01/6836 Op. of the 27th current, I mean to make mass on the left and to head as quickly as possible at Bug Bug and Sidi el Barrani by the coastal line of operation.

3) INITIAL ALIGNMENT OF THE FORCES:

a) The Libyan divisions group in the first formation between Capuzzo and Ghirba;
b) XXIII army corps (less the 1st cc.nn. division " 23 March ") in second formation, initially behind the Libyan divisions group, inclining, as indicated orally, slightly towards the right;
c) The 1st division cc. nn. "23 March" and the I tank battalion (M) initially in area of Sidi Azeiz, at my direct command.

4) The Maletti grouping, at the directed command of the Supercomando, will be initially in the area of Sidi Omar. It will be reinforced by M.11 tank company that it will be yielded to it by the Libyan divisions group Commander. Agreements directed between the two commanders.

5) The tank commander (General Babini) passes to my command at Bardia. The I tank battalions (L) will act in mass with the G. U. which currently they are assigned. I reserve myself to specify.

6) DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANEUVER:

1st phase, x day (9 September):

- *Libyan divisions group.* The 1st Libyan div. moves itself to Gabr Saleh supported by the 2nd Libyan;

- XXIII army corps. It will proceed to the occupation of the previewed localities between Marsa er Ramla and Capuzzo and to the previewed advanced alignment of the artilleries;

x day + 1, x day + 2: all the units reach their assigned zones of alignment, of which to n. 3, with the warnings indicated orally. The movement of XXIII A. C. To is completed after that the Libyan divisions group is passed.

2nd phase, day x + 3 and following:

- the group Libyan divisions moves with its division of the left in the direction of Musaid (left on the left) - Sollum-Bug Bug, astride of the coastal road and with the division of the right in the direction Ghirba-Uadi Halfaya, in order subsequently to come down between the escarpment and the sea and to proceed placed side by side to the other division. To hold present the being necessary tempo and the possibility that the two roads are interrupted.

The movement, in particular that one of the division of left, will be supported from the alignment of the artilleries of XXIII the C.A;

- the XXIII C.A. Formation between Capuzzo and Gabr Asceram, ready to move, both towards Sollum, and towards the Halfaya Wadi, in order to come down then between the escarpment and the sea, just as the Libyan group has earned space ahead beyond the Halfaya Wadi. Its division of right must be ready to take part to protection of the 2nd Libyan division in its advancing movement of towards the Halfaya Wadi.

The division "23 March" and the I tank battalion (M-11) will be moved behind the alignment of the XXIII Corp. The tank battalion should be ready at any moment to intervene in favor of Libyan divisions group.

The Maletti grouping from Sidi Omar heads for Gabr bu Fares, for protection of the right flank of the army.

7) THE AIR FORCE.

Nothing changed about the tasks and arrangements set out in my previous order No. 01/6836 op. and 01/6917.

For tomorrow, x day, I have asked that:

- control of the sky between Gabr Saleh and Bir el Gobi and that one between the fort Capuzzo-Marsa er Ramla and Sollum;
- beginnings the actions of bombardment of noted collections of troops and mechanized means between Sidi Barrani-Bir Dignash and Sollum.

8) Nothing varied as far as the connections (my sheet 01/7010). The Libyan divisions group supplies to establish the connection with the Maletti grouping not as soon as reach the alignment zone.

9) PROTECTION OF THE REAR:

It remains entrusted to the XXIII Corp., that to provide to you with it locates and the dispositions already in action. Will send a strong detachment of artillery in the day tomorrow (x day) to Gabr Saleh, besides that one already sent to Bir el Gobi.

10) SERVICES:

In the initial phase the Intendancy will assure the operation of the services until the town of Bardia; for the successive phases it reserves orders. For the water the Libyan divisions group will be supplied at Capuzzo with precedence on the other units.

11) My command will work today at Bardia from 18:00 hours.
Receipt.

The Commanding General
M. Berti

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA

18 September 1940

To: Stamage

N. 01/660/Op. (.) At 2561 Op. (.) Primitive design operations previewed essentially attack going around for the right (,) to integrate Then at the opportune moment with twofold action wrapping on Sidi el Barrani (.) As (,) in the meantime (,) situation enemy forces went emphasizing accumulations mechanized elements at external capacity director (Bir Chreigat-Der el Brug-Bir Dignash (,) that would have had to be continuation from our right wing (,) decided to radically change operating design (,) concentrating all our forces on left & heading rapidly at Sidi el Barrani for director by arduous tracks and lacking in every resource (.) I gave orders at once (:) in synthesis (:) the Libyan divisions group from Bir Gobi-Gabr Saleh in the forward formation between Capuzzo & Ghirba (.) the twenty third army Corps in second line behind the Libyan divisions (.) With its mighty forward medium artillery alignment & Libyan small-caliber had to support attack (;) in reserve two quick elements (.) mixed Maletti Grouping on the right (,) ready to take advantage of foretold external director (,) the trucked "23 March" division all on the left (.) Development maneuver previewed in two phases (.) The first (:) movement in order to reach in the departure position (.) Second (:) attack the passes Sollum & Halfaya & fast advanced towards Barrani (.) In base of the situation I reserved myself to decide approximately moment launch quick columns (.) Movements first phase were carried out with some difficulty in the sourness of the desert from part Maletti grouping (,) subordinate also to repeated aerial bombing (.) Thinking impossible entrust them still task to act isolated from the desert director (,) I moved it more to the north (,) to Ghirba (,) at tightened tenth army right contact (.) It was becoming also to necessary a day pause for reorganizing and reconstruction logistic equipments (.) advance in forces on Sollum & Halfaya (,) starting day of the 13th (.) & continuation towards east picked of enemy surprise that attended our more main columns at the south (,) from Sidi Omar to Sceferzen (.) On the 14th evening Libyan divisions (,) the overwhelming enemy resistance (.) had reached Tidani el Khadim at approximately 25 km. from Sollum (.) I judged decisive moment arrived & I ordered immediately that it reserves (.) constituted from quick columns "23 March" & Maletti (,) to overtake the Libyan divisions headed

decidedly on Barrani (.) Although difficulties on the moment (,) now awful conditions tracks & for raging *ghibli* (,) have not allowed to occupy Sidi Barrani in the day of the 15th (,) but only on the next day (,) however maneuver can be considered a beautiful success (,) English Armored division (,) in fact (,) hardly realize of the threat on Barrani (,) its hurried to withdraw hasty along desert tracks (,) chased without rest (,) bombed & strafed from our untiring flocks (,) that have seeded its rows destruction & disorder (,) Great part of its means is remained abandoned along tracks (,) Many symptoms have revealed supply crisis (,) especially fuel & water (,) as well as disorientation & nervousness of the enemy command (,) Behavior (,) valor & spirit of sacrifice of all the armed forces (,) ground & air (,) it is being superior to each praise (,) especially holding the existing ground conditions (,) the enemy thought the season prohibitive & above all to raging *ghibli* suffocating during the decisive day (.)

First to enter Barrani were the cc. nn. "23 March" (,) In perfect communion spirit with army & military revolution (,) arrogant test have given the Libyan units (,) In only eight days have traveled on foot approximately 250 km. of desert (,) fighting & enduring serenely aerial attacks & artillery bombardments (,) refute therefore the lies disseminated from enemy propaganda that Libyan would not have held (.)

Operation (,) on the whole have exceeded every expectation since its resolution at to realize being in a strange in a theater of operations that this being strange a priori excluded (.)

From the logistical point of view has done miracles (.)

The Egyptian Press ("Ahram" 11 August) judged that between the sea & desert they could have journeyed at the maximum 15 or 20 thousand men and that passage trucks & armored cars was most difficult (,) specially from August to mid October (,) & a compelling testament (: "A similar element would wave 5 probability followed with 100 & only for the season from November to March" (,) Finished (.)

The Enemy (,) made all possible resistance contrasting the land hand by hand (,) its finally be swept up from the maneuver that gripped it & hasty withdrawal on Marsa Matruh (,) destroying & setting afire warehouses & barracks & burying storehouses (,) it can calculate that it has more lost of the half of his medium armor (,) among those hit from aviation & those dispersing in the desert followed at disorganized withdraw (.)

Aviation lavished itself untiringly with actions opposing bombing (,) throwing among its rows terror (,) & with protection of the columns marching in the desert tied with cruises of the fighters (,) of the front to which the strong formation of enemy Gloster have constantly turn their back.

Whereas the English critics already cited opinion that would not pass just a few motor vehicles (,) during the action (,) there passed approximately two thousand (,) evident demonstration of a logistic effort of such power (,) that sure it could not be conceived (,) & as well as realized less from the British mentality (,) that would have perhaps preferred to complete these methodical advance creating to follow from the construction of a railroad (,) like that one of Lord Kitchener of blessed memory in the Sudan (.)

Equal to the effort of their machines is the resistance of our infantry (,) of the cc. nn. the and of the Libyan troops that (,) under a heat of 50 degrees & in the turbines of sands raised by the fervid *ghibli* (,) itself are contented of the customary liter of water of Neghelli(,)

We question when English will begin to understand that they have to do with the best equipped colonial army of the world & when finally to prevail to know valor of the Italian soldier (,) It will learn soon how much (,)*

GRAZIANI

* the last paragraph was not opportunely published.

The Prime Minister to Min. of War and the Chief of the Imperial G.S.

GENERAL DIRECTIVES FOR THE SUPREME COMMANDER
IN THE MIDDLE EAST (UK)

PART I.

16 August 1940

1. The invasion on an immense scale of Egypt from Libya must by now be attended to every moment. And therefore necessary to collect and to distribute the greatest possible forces along and towards the western frontier. Every consideration of political and administrative character will have to be duly subordinated to this necessity.

2. The evacuation of the Somalia is forced by the enemy, but it is however strategically opportune. All the forces allocated in Somalia, or destined there, must be sent to Aden, in the Sudan via Port Sudan, or to Egypt, according to which is more opportune.

3. The defense of the Kenya must pass to the second line regarding that one of the Sudan. We would have to be the time, after the crisis in Egypt and Sudan, to next strengthen Kenya by sea and railroad that a large Italian expeditionary corps can reach the river Lair. We will be able to always reinforce the Kenya before that the Italians can move the troops from Abyssinia or Italian Somalia.

4. Consequently, or the two brigades of Western Africa or the two of the "King's African Rifles" must be transferred to Khartoum. It is being asked of General Smuts for the "Union Brigade", or one great part of it, steps in the zone of the Cannel or the Delta with the goal of inner security. It must be supplied to continue the training. A relationship is being asked the Admiralty on the possibilities of the mercantile ship in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

5. In view of the constant aerial attack that can later on be previewed in the Red Sea to the Italian conquest of the British Somalia, are important that the aerial defense of Aden is strengthened.

6. The two brigades, the Australian and that one of regular, garrison in Palestine, must now to pass to the Delta in order to clear the communications of Palestine for the movements of other reserves, as soon as they can come equipped for the active service or organized for that one of the internal security.

7. However, three or four dismounted regiments of British cavalry must take service in the zone of the Cannel, disengaging the three regular battalions who find themselves as general reserve of the Forces of the Delta.

8. The rest of the Australians in Palestine, comprising 6 battalions, will be therefore in a position to being able with a warning of five days to pass into the Delta in order to supply to the inner security or other emergency services. The Polish brigade and the "French Voluntary" unit will have to be transferred in the Delta from Palestine in order to make part of the general reserve.

9. The movements of the Indian division must be accelerated to the maximum. Less some of the troops evacuated from the Somalia and not necessary to Aden they are thought sufficient to strengthen the defense of the Sudan, beyond to reinforcements coming from Kenya, this division is complete, as it is necessary, it will have to press until Suez for then combine with the Forces of the Delta [called the Army of the Nile]. Beyond to the aforesaid ones, at least three batteries of British artillery, even if horse-drawn, will have boarded to be at once in India for Suez. When the Admiralty is up to predispose the transport.

10. The greater part of these transfers will have to be completed between the 15 September and 1st October, and therefore the Forces of the Delta will have to comprise:

- a) The British armored forces in Egypt;
- b) The four British battalions of Marsa Matruh, the two of Alexandria and the two of the Cairo, total, eight battalions;
- c) The three battalions of the Zone of the Canal;
- d) coming from the British reserve brigade from Palestine, that is 14 infantry battalions of regular troops;
- e) the New Zealand brigade;
- f) the Australian brigade of Palestine;
- g) the Polish brigade;
- h) part of the "Union Brigade" coming from the East Africa;
- i) the 4th Indian division hour to the rear of Marsa Matruh;
- j) the new Indian division;
- k) the 11,500 men en route to Suez;
- l) all artillery (150 guns) now in the Middle East or en route from India;
- m) the army Egyptian in total that in which it can be utilized as active service.

11. The aforesaid bodies will have to form, for 1st October to more belatedly, 39 battalions, along with the armored forces: a total of, That is to say

of 56,500 men and 212 guns. Independently from the troops of inner security

PART II

12. One hopes that the Admiralty makes to pass the armored brigade of three regiments of tanks through the Mediterranean. If that is revealed to be impossible, their long arrival will have to be previewed the route of the Cape in the first fortnight of October. The arrival of these forces in September must be considered therefore important to justify a considerable degree of risk for their transport.

PART III

Tactical Employment of the aforesaid force.

13. The position of Marsa Matruh must completely be fortified and very soon. The field held by the three Egyptians battalions with support from the three British battalions, therefore to render that force homogenous. That will have to be made also where the Government Egyptian want to withdraw the artillery now in hand to these three battalions. The possibility to supply of troops by sea the position of Marsa Matruh and to cut the enemy communications, when the Italians pass beyond, directed towards the Delta, must be studied by the supreme commander of the Fleet of the Mediterranean. Otherwise one will be able to prefer descent on the communications of Sollum or also more to the west.

14. All the water supplies between the defense of Mersa Matruh and Alexandria must be "made undrinkable". No attempt must be made to leave squads to defend the pools near the coast, in this region. The 4th Indian division will have to retire on Alexandria, when necessary, or to be evacuated by sea. The road from Sollum to Marsa Matruh and still more that one asphalted from Marsa Matruh to Alexandria must be rendered impassable, when abandoned, from delayed explosion mines or the chemical treatment of the asphalt surface.

15. Main a defensive line, that it will have to be held from all the army of the Delta, with its reserves opportunely distributed, must be prepared (as already from much time would have had to make) long from Alexandria the margin of the cultivated zone and the irrigation channels of the Delta. For this purpose there will be constructed, or completed, the strongest defense in armed concrete and sand bags, with nests of machine-guns, from the sea until the cultivated zone and to the main channel of irrigation. The culvert of oil in front of this line must be extended with the maximum possible speed. The zone of the Delta is the most effective obstacle for army tanks of every kind and can easy be held with obstructions of sandbags, for the defense of Egypt and the constitution of a

balance flank on the front of Alexandria. A strip of territory, four or five miles wide, must be flooded from waters of the Nile, controlled from Aswan. Within, or behind, this belt must be constructed one series of fortified emplacements of artillery.

16. In this way the army of the Nile will await the Italian invasion. There is from previewing that the enemy will advance with great forces, slowed down only, but sourly, from the sparsely of water and fuel. He will decide sure of remarkable armored forces in order to contain and to reject our most insufficient ones, less than these they do not come improved in time from the coming from armored regiment from Great Britain. It will cover, if it will not be able destroy them, Marsa Matruh. But if the main line of the Delta diligently fortified and firmly held, the enemy will be forced to put in field an army whose water supply, oil, rations and ammunitions will be much difficult. When this army seriously was engaged, the action against its lines of communication from Marsa Matruh, from bombardment from the sea, attack on Sollum, or also much more to the west, would constitute a mortal blow for it.

17. The campaign for the defense of the Delta abridges in: *its defense knits with the left wing from the hinterland of Alexandria and a widening of that right, using our naval superiority against its communications*. At the same time it is hope that ours it reinforcements with base at Malta prevent the shipment of further reinforcements - Italian or German - from Europe to Africa.

18. All that could be put into effect for 10 October, *since ourselves is given the time*. Various, we must make what we can. All the units trained or of regular, totally equipped or not, will have to be employed in the defense of the Delta. All the units armed of white men, also foreign, and pure those Indians must be used for the inner security. The Army Egyptian will have to make its part in support of the front of the Delta.

I pray to make to supply for said how much over and for argue with me detailed 16 August to 04:30 of the afternoon.

REPORT OF MEETING HELD BY THE
JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF
ON 25 SEPTEMBER 1940

Present are:

Ecc Gen. of C.A. Ubaldo SODDU – Undersecretary. for the war;
Ecc Adm. of A. Domenico CAVAGNARI - Chief of G.S. of R. Navy;
Ecc Gen. des. of Air force Francisco PRICOLO - Chief of G.S. of R. AF.;
Ecc Lt. Gen. Achille STARACE - Chief of G.S. of the M.V.S.N.;
Ecc Gen. of C.A. Mario ROATTA - Undersecretary of G.S. of the R.A.;
Ecc Gen. of sq. aerial Giuseppe SANTORO - Undersecretary of G.S. of the R.A.;
Gen. Quirino ARMELLINI - general assigned.

Secretaries:

Col. A.A.R.N. Ferdinand RAFFAELLI - Chief Und. Sect. of the supreme com.;
Lt. Federico MOHRHOFF - stenographer.

The meeting has begin at 09:00 hours.

Ecc Badoglio. - I have convened You here for discuss the political military situation that has been created in these last days. We begin from that we have prepared.

Yugoslavia - To maintain the alignment, rather in depth indeed a lot in depth, since is not probable an participation in that country. He would be expectable only in the case that their was an inner upheaval in Yugoslavia, hypothesis that is not thought next. Also holding this alignment a very deep in the Po valley - we have of the rest of the deployed forces in optimal position - we will be in a position to being able to then block at the bottom. Our interest and interest of the German ally is that one not to alter for now the situation in Yugoslavia, since this country supplies us many raw materials.

Greece - At the end of the month we will have completed the transport of the 3 div. to Albania. We will have therefore in Albania 8 div. more non-divisional troops, among which 3 regt. of cav., equal to an another division.

Speaking to Viscount Prasca, who has come here, I have dictated that he is not necessary that these forces are all thickened to the border at the Epirus, since would be themselves to create difficult conditions to the troops living. In Albania, he must also hold account of another necessity: that one to avoid the deep valley because of malaria. Therefore I have said: begun from two or three days of distance from the Greek border and spaced out the troops, putting in the best living conditions and possibility of instruction.

These troops, therefore as they have been concentrated in Albania, are - seeming to the Duce - sufficient in order to hold that place against Greece, which does not have any intention of attacking, since it has a greatest fear is in the cares of Bulgaria then of us.

Once put to place these three divisions, we consider the stabilized situation as, being the Greek problem, therefore as in the Yugoslavia problem, one of those problems that will be resolved at the table of the peace, willing or not to the interested.

We come now to the Mediterranean. – Here we find a situation that is as dark and chaotic as ever. Since we have the movement of dissidence, fomented by De Gaulle, who do not know-no one can swear-whether it is wanted or not intentional from the French Government. It cannot be sworn that the authorities that are in North Africa and those that they are in Syria are for or against this movement. In any case, it is of fact that yesterday had been marked a naval action between the English troops with De Gaulle, or without De Gaulle, against Dakar, resistance from part of the French troops at Dakar, and a retort on Gibraltar from part of French aircraft.

We will see, in a few days, what it will be able to be known on this situation, but sure it is that draft of a situation that gives a moment to the other will be able to mature and force ourselves to make a determination.

Without wishing to get into the field of hypotheses, but for what we all know already, isn't excluded a Hispano-German action against Gibraltar. The Duce was worried a lot about this question and exactly yesterday he has said to me: it may be that front to the thrust directed upon Gibraltar, the English try to make for themselves some other bases in the Mediterranean, and precisely Corsica or Biserta.

As far as Corsica, I have been able to assure the Duce that the General Staff of the Army had already completed the study of the invasion of the Corsica from the north and the south, by means of two divisions, one coming from Sardinia, the other coming from Livorno, so that in a little time Corsica could be occupied by us. It remains to only establish the amount of transports necessary. And for this they will be able to be requisite, beyond the ships already requisite by R. Marina, all the ships that are in our ports.

Ecc Cavagnari. - I believe that there is little to requisition, since between Navy and the Army, is all in our hands.

Ecc Badoglio. - In order now, I you would ask the G.S. of the Army, that it has already made its study, to take contact with the G.S. of Navy and Aviation, for as much as, Aviation the thing is simple, since from the fields of the Sardinia, the airplane will pass easy to the airfields of the Corsica.

I must tell the Duce: from the day in which he give the order to me, many days for the requisition of means and the resolution are necessary.

Ecc Roatta. - our plan already has been made with agreement of the Navy. Draft to only fix the days being necessary.

Ecc Badoglio. - This problem not my worry, since we have means and the possibility of develop them quickly. More complicated, instead, it is the other problem that the Duce has said to me to examine, that is that one of the occupation of the naval and aerial base of Biserta.

Then we find ourselves in presence of two solutions:

1) The occupation of Biserta from the side of the Tripolitania, by means of the in flow of forces from the same Tripolitania. Of the other part we know that the 5th Army already have been striped and that the problem of putting in place by all means that General Garibaldi demands requires three months of time. Evidently solution is to discard one. In three months who knows how many events will happen!

2) Troops of the Motherland boarded and transported by the R. Navy to occupy by force Biserta. This is the study that I entrust to the G.S. of the Army, requesting to carry then ahead promptly, seeing as an example which troops can take from Sicily, that they are those nearest ones and that they are better lend, which are the provisions that R. Navy can take in this field and as many days as are necessary. For the Air Force the problem is once again simple, since the aircraft from Sicily could go to the airfield of Biserta; after the envisioned next reinforcements.

As you know, we have given to the Commission of Armistice these directives: until 31 December, the French army of Africa of the North can add one hundred thousand men. We are forced to grant these terms to the French since if the units, especially those of color, immediately were dismissed, we would have to them in the form of armed bands against us, that would be worse.

In the condition of the dispersing of them between the several Colonies, we have said: the minimum in Tunisia, little more in Algeria, the rest in Morocco, that is to stretch to detach them more and more from us.

General Pintor, that he studies this issue for the Commission of Armistice, will then establish exactly with the French the true consistency of the various units.

At the same time already they have been begun to disarm all the forts of Biserta, according to the report that I have read this morning from Admiral Farina. Therefore, possibility of resistance from their part, if it arrives at making an aimed decision, not believe that they will discover us,

but can begin also an other case. It can give that as a result of some English occupation on the coast of the Atlantic - than I do not exclude at all - our Government on behalf imposes to the French Government the use of the base ours and therefore later on to the imposition, not is resistance. We will do good but always to suppose the resistance, because therefore will be easier to resolve the situation.

I think therefore that this problem, for the speed with which it must be faced, cannot be otherwise resolved that with one shipment from the Sicily towards Biserta.

I will illustrate to you another point of the situation.

The Germans have not still abandoned the idea to make an invasion, before the middle of October. I allow myself to express a personal opinion: the invasion will not be made. Since I would not know it to say. It is an impression that is perhaps created in me for too much to have lengthened from the end of July until now. If the invasion happens there is not but to wait for the solution of the events. If it does not happen, and the war continues in the winter period, then the center of gravity of it will be moved from the north to the Mediterranean.

In this case one will have place a meeting between the Italian G.S. General and the German G.S. General in order to exactly determine the way and the limits of this our action, that I glimpse therefore in its general lines: action on Gibraltar in order to remove that support to the English fleet from that side; further our advance in the Marmarica for moving ourselves towards to the port of Alexandria through Marsa Matruh and perhaps more in here than Marsa Matruh, so as to arrange there the airfields; an participation of our aviation and German aviation from the Marmarica towards Alexandria in order to render untenable that port. If we render the life in the port of Alexandria impossible, I do not know if the English fleet will be able to resist in the Mediterranean; therefore it will be forced to cross the Suez Canal and to abandon Egypt completely.

I do not see another solution than this, therefore of those along telegram, mandate this morning from General Graziani and that you have read, Roatta...

Ecc Roatta. - ... not yet.

Ecc Badoglio. - ...in which he it exposes the logistic problem of the operations, that it is the more interesting, I ask you to take a look with all calm and to see what we can make in order to put Graziani in the best conditions, as we have made until now.

But, I repeat, these are not but assumptions that we will then have to discuss with the German General Staff in order to see if it is of the same idea. I - repeat - do not see other possibility to act, that acting to the two branches, rendering it untenable to the English fleet. If we succeed to chasing them from the Mediterranean, we dominate the Mediterranean and not then there is nothing more that can stop us.

As conclusion of this outline that I have made you, you must know to say: 1) how many days from the warning are necessary for a

eventual action on Corsica; 2) how many days from the warning are necessary for an action on Biserta; 3) how many days are necessary for the two operations, if these come made at the same time.

Ecc Pricolo. - For the action on Biserta the use could be asked for some airfield in Tunisia for know for now in reconcile through the Commission of Armistice. It is one of my old idea: it would serve also for the communications with Tripoli.

Ecc Badoglio. - I will ask the Duce. I would be but contrary to put an alarm bell down there, since the thing, if we must make, we will have give a surprise.

Ecc Pricolo. - These fields could be used as transit for Tripolitania.

Ecc Cavagnari. - I recall a previous one: you have asked for the use of the Biserta-Sfax railroad for the transport of heavy materials by train and they have answered to you that they did not give it, because as it would have taken as a position against the English.

Ecc Badoglio. - Now is for to await all. I repeat that none of us can swear that the Government of Vichy is not in agreement with De Gaulle. I would not swear it. Although that those are of the respectable persons, when one has in mind to serve just the country make also to cheat.

In order now we see this situation that that is now maturing, it becomes more and more confused later on to the delay of the operations in the north and is rendered still more difficult to understand for the difficulty of guideline between all the contrasting information, that they come from every part also from unauthorized person, so that whichever Italian, that ever it had before not been remembered of Italy, now is felt in obligation to write, to send of letters to the Duce, saying: it succeeds this and this other. Most times it is not true and it is only come as to upset the situation.

Ecc Pricolo. - The eventual German co-operation against Alexandria in what would it consist? How many arms and also for aircraft?

Ecc Badoglio. - The Germans have offered two armored divisions. Roatta that has quickly studied the issue has inasmuch as for the transport of a single armored division three months will be necessary. We must keep in mind we have an abundance of men and that these men in Africa are superior to the German soldiers.

Therefore, if I must deal with the issue, I will deal mostly for the cession of materials not of men.

Instead I cannot say: give me your aircraft to entrust to us; since they would not ever give them. For aviation therefore it will probably be a matter of you leave again organic.

Ecc Pricolo. - If we are at Marsa Matruh we do not have need of German aircraft in order to reach the goal. We will be at 270 - 290 km.

Ecc Badoglio. - All more we will be able to ask an equal share to that one that we have sent up there: about eighty *Stukas* and a hundred *Messerschmitt*.

Ecc Pricolo. - If we place the logistic problem - transport of bombs and materials - these same difficulties that we will have to then exceed in order for live Germans, we will be able to exceed in order to increase our possibilities for them.

Ecc Badoglio. - These are, but, detail issues, since first of all it will have to see if the Germans join to this our line of conduct, because he is not people with which it can easy be dealt! In general line, I have this opinion and a manifesto.

The meeting finishes at 09:30.

BADOGLIO

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
Marshal of Italy RODOLFO GRAZIANI

N. 01/1500 op.

Cyrene, 15 October 1940-XVIII

To His Excellency Badoglio Chief of General Staff

ROME

With to the dispatch of the demonstrative elements of the G.S. I allow myself, Excellency, addressed in this letter to the goal to better clear my thought in merit to the operation for the occupation of Marsa Matruh.

1. If it can be considered sure that the English await us on the Delta for the definitive battle, it cannot exclude oneself *a priori* that they mean to oppose us with forces adapted, supported by entrenched field, the occupation of Marsa Matruh, has obvious importance for the both sides.

The same reasons that cause us to want to maintain, will push the enemy want to prevent.

In any case who moves to the attack cannot evidently base his concept of operations on the presupposed escape of the enemy.

Indeed he must consider the contrary, and introduce in superior forces to those of the adversaries, after to have predisposed a logistic organization that allows to give life to the operating body and feed him, and that, especially in the desert, rises to vital importance (and in our case in the most special way) given the employment of masses, for which the colonial-desert logistic factor adds to the tactical one of continental-European character.

2. What enemy forces that oppose us, supported by a well armed, entrenched camp is now assume from his deployment, from our information and aerial surveys, by the same news that provides S.I.M (attached documents). They are:

They are:

a) the armored division by now sure reconstituted and that certainly suggests retires at the beginning of our movement to gather near the entrenched camp and offend grounded when we will approach it;

b) the Indiana division spaced out between Matruh and Fuka;

c) the New Zealand division between Fuka and Daba.

The last aerial recognitions notice, in fact, a dense succession of encampments on the Fuka-Daba director, appearances in these days.

To add eventual threats from Siwa for the optimal road Siwa-Bir Kenays-Matruh.

3. Which are the mobile forces that are possible and indispensable to us to put in field it turns out from attached documents.

4. Which it is our logistic situation and of the rears it appears also from attached documents.

Of the enemy, that he has a railroad and a hardened road for the inflow of the effectives on the supposed battlefield, we move forward from only a single direction, which would be insufficient subsidized from lateral flanking movements.

Has in the highest degree, on the logistic situation, the water availability.

The water, to the except for an insufficient amount (150 mc. to the day that in effects can be collection in the leaking galleries dunes of Bug-Bug, it still comes from Capuzzo and that is from a distance of 100 km. approximately from Barrani on road much difficult distance, in kind, and that it becomes dunes and most onerous in the section Bug-Bug-Barrani (km. 45), where the silt allow a found it hard traffic much and wearing away for the machines.

The equipments of water to the continuation of the troops will be to the limit when these will reach to board the mountain spurs, that they encircle and protect the entrenched field of Matruh.

From that moment the columns of water supplies will have to complete between here and the rear:

400 km. approximately if they reach to Bug Bug;

280 km. if to Barrani.

For the solution of the water problem it is not therefore to only based on the fact that the less warm season allows a lesser consumption, but also and especially on the drawing places that do not change for increasing of the distance from the current ones, indeed if some of them remote.

5. The hypotheses that can be made in the tactical field are two:

a) or is succeeded to smash in of sudden rush and to occupy at once the entrenched field after to have battered the enemy forces, that they will be in prepared positions;

b) or instead it will have been arrested on the spurs before it, that that will stabilize the action on lines counter opposed to exceed then with a battle of prepared breach.

In the first case the water index however resolved and will be exceeded even if will remain onerous for after, given the sparsely of water around at Marsa Matruh.

In the second case will weigh on the combatant troops *dangerously* given the great distance to complete for the supplying, as I have above specified.

They must add to this the other supplying, for which the traffic it will have to develop on the same single artery.

As far as the use of supplying from airplane the issue is subordinated to the affluence of the aero-supply, spaced out in the time (approximately 1300 for the end of October; all 5000 for the first ten days of December). Currently one arranges only 100 (one hundred) exemplary ones and therefore of the calculation for eventual supplying via airplane will only be able to be made in subsidy from the ground.

6. The lack of motor vehicles for auto-transporting the operating troops cancels every possibility of surprise since our movement will at once be sighted and the enemy will have all the time in order to assume his defensive and counteroffensive deployments.

7. The verification of the second hypothesis of those enunciated to 5th codicil that is will be taken place therefore and the stabilization with all prejudicial unfavorable given the difficulty of feeding the battle stabilization of the front at Matruh with inflow of new effectives and logistic means.

8. It is in any case to exclude the eventuality to make to march the national troops on foot, is because they lacks baggage train and is because that minimum of trucks for the transport of the artilleries, the machine-guns, ammunitions and those is not possible to assign them a few equipments to the water continuation, above all, closely indispensable for giving them live and to fight. It would have, in fact, to give to each metropolitan division at *least* 300 trucks, as many that is as has a Libyan division that has a group of artillery less and is, on the whole, logistically less heavy.

After 140 km. of march on foot with this climate and terrain the metropolitan troops would arrive weakened.

Neither is from thinking about being able to invest the entrenched field of Matruh with the only two Libyan divisions they also on foot and the Maletti Grouping since with that would run the risk.

This examination of the operating elements my door to judge on the impossibility to carry out now the operation, and to the necessity of postpone it until that were not satisfied the conditions that some of them cancel the negative perspectives and that is:

a) arrangement of the road already in course of performance until Barrani;

b) water duct from Sollum to Barrani is also begun and that it could be completed with the means that I have already requisitioned in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, without need of inflow from the Mother country.

Dispose in fact already of approximately 120 km. of piping to moved to the worksite (other requirement of transport; it already follows a compiled plan for the extension to Matruh);

c) organization in way of effectuation of the Caterpillar trains of which I have requirement 60 (sixty) units between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, also they in way of in flow, collection, and systemizing of the towing, and that they would give a contribution of great importance to the solution of the logistic problem;

d) to complete shipments in motor vehicles in the quantity indicated in the "Memorandum".

This organization, intensifying to the maximum the efforts, could be realized in a term of a pair of months and the most special theater of operations would put to us in conditions for acting with the guarantees taxes and of which an operating concept is not possible not to hold account in formulating, considering that a failure would have enormous repercussions for all the course of the war.

The Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
R. GRAZIANI

Annexed to f. 01/1500 op.

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

15 October 1940. - XVIII

Memorandum on the operation for the conquest of Marsa Matruh

1) THE TERMS OF THE PROBLEM

A) *From the enemy side* (assessment of the situation):

-1 armored division (approximately 400 tanks and armored cars) in the quadrilateral Bir Kamsa - Zaviet Tarfaia - Zaviet el Rakam - Bir Gellaz.

(Although hardly tried to Sidi Barrani, the division has been able to replace losses of personnel and materials: news confirmed from interceptions);

-1 Indian division, located between Marsa Matruh and Fuka;

-1 division (New Zealand?) spaced out between Fuka and Daba and that is ready to flow on Marsa Matruh by railroad and road open to truck traffic.

For not to exclude the co-operation of quick units and armored cars from Siwa.

From our side (operating column):

-2 Libyan divisions: trucked infantry on foot, artillery and services; a small baggage train of 300 mules per division; (1)

-1 division trucked infantry, without baggage train (*Sirte* Inf. div.);

-1 trucked mixed grouping (Maletti) of 3 bns. and 5 bty., of which 2 anti-aircraft;

-1 grouping of artillery of counter-battery destruction and (2 gr. of 149/13; 3 gr. of 100/17 and 2 gr. of 105/28);

-1 grouping of 70 M/11 tanks and 6 tank M/13 (2);

-1 metropolitan division (trucked) of the reserve.

B) *Relationships of distance and practicability.*

Enemy:

- Troops and depots already in the place or carried by way of the railroad and the road open to truck traffic;

-1 road and 1 railroad from Alexandria of Egypt;

-2 tracks from Siwa (one asphalted).

Us:

- Bulk of the forces to 140-160 km. from Marsa Matruh (and that is at a distance that it could be covered in 6 days or less, - of the rest - holding to base the speed of march of the Libyan troops that are on foot).

Depots:

-: of greater size at Bardia and Capuzzo or more behind;

- of minimal entity at Bug Bug (depot water of approximately 150 cubic meters);

- still nothing at Sidi Barrani (too much exposed to all attack).

Roads (only one, constituted from two distinguished parts):

- track in awful conditions from Sollum to Bug Bug;

- nonexistent, that is reduced to a sand sea, from Bug Bug to Barrani;

- open to truck traffic from Barrani to Marsa Matruh, already interrupted in many points with mined and cut sections.

(1) A single day of water for the entire division would demand 450 Milliliters.

(2) The remaining. 31 tanks - M13 is still unserviceable for the lack of third axle.

2) *CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OPERATION.*

a) While for the conquest of Sidi Barrani we have began already to contact the bases (Capuzzo and Bardia), today we must begin the approach beyond 100 km. from them. Not only, but the greater distance today respect then is represented from the Capuzzo - Sollum - Barrani section, whose terminal leg, as it has been said, is deadly to the effects of the strain of the machines and the duration of for course (the maximum speed of the convoys: 8 km. hour).

b) The Libyans will have to advance on foot. From that a slow movement, that it comes to exclude surprise, and logistically onerous: the needs during the advance become six times a lot of those necessary to a trucked movement.

c) Every pause, is for movement difficulty is for resistance of the enemy, is translate in a logistic burden, that it becomes more and more serious for the natural losses and those of war character that the motor vehicles will suffer.

d) This burden not will stop not even when we will have conquered Marsa Matruh, from moment that we will not find resources of some kind here and the same total water availability - only resource that we will be able to find, if is not polluted from the enemy - is reduced to the yield of 5 pools, in each of which is from the 60 to the 100 cm. of water.

3) *DEDUCTIONS and CONCLUSIONS.*

The characteristics with which the operation is introduced and the necessity from our part to satisfy the disparities of conditions in which the action will have to happen, impose therefore three orders of provisions:

1) to transport the maximum of our forces in order to attenuate the as much as possible crisis of the approach;

2) to implant preventively on land the necessary depots of water, fuels and ammunitions, suitable to feeding the operating mass, in a limit of such distance our troops to assure the continuity of the supplies;

3) to prepare, in parallel, or more water columns on wheels, so as to satisfy the eventual interruptions of the supply that were tax by the action of enemy (1).

All these hinges are necessities on two possibility:

- to be able to decide of a total figure of 3227 trucks (see document C);
- to put into effect with these maneuver of means in the phase of preparation and, in the limits of the possible, also during the action.

(1) One day of water for the entire operating column absorbs 80 trucks equipped with two tanks of 1,250 liters.

In order to use such possibilities, this General Staff has considered the availability of efficient motor vehicles both of the army (appendix 1 to document C), and of the Intendancy (appendix. 2) and provisions understood to reduce all the closely unconnected requirements to the operations.

In such order of ideas it has been computed the possible recoveries:

- leaving the units of the army not destined to operate the minimum necessary for the every day life and the immediate safety of the line of communication and the bases;
- contracting to the maximum the normal services of Intendancy (unloading and outflow from the ports; reinstate of the depots; transports of the rear, etc.);
- it both suspending the street work from Sollum to Sidi Barrani, and the putting in work of the water duct;
- putting into effect the maneuver of all means of transport of the army and intendancy for the constitution of the advanced depots.

The result of such compute are reassumed in appendix 3 document C.

From them are deduced that the quantitative maximum of motor vehicles available for operating column -1903 trucks is inferior to the 2/3 of the total requirements -3227 units -, which it represents the commensurate minimum closely to the operating necessities.

It remains therefore discovered a deficiency of 1324 motor vehicles, whose filling constitutes an indispensable condition for the performance of the planned offensive action: deficiency that would increase to 1924 unit, where it was wanted to completely auto-transport the two Libyan divisions, and that is inclining infantry.

Leut. General. Chief of the G.S.
G. TELLERA

GRAZIANI

Document C

FORMATION OPERATING COLUMN
AND MOTOR VEHICLES REQUIREMENTS

with 3 attachments:

1. 10th Army Truck Situation to 5 October (chart).
2. Serviceable motor vehicles situation at disposition of the Intendancy N.A. (letter copy 12 00/1101/12 of 12 October).
3. Employment previewed for the trucks available.

OPERATING COLUMN FORMATION
AND MOTOR VEHICLES REQUIREMENTS

Motor vehicles

Operation Column Formation	Required	Available	Sill needed	Notes
XXIII C. d'A. Command with share troops and services reduced to a minimum	83	83 (A)	-	(A) Supplied from the Army
- Sirte division (<i>trucked</i>)	600	114 (I)	486	(I) Supplied from the Intendancy
- metropolitan div. in reservoir	600	-	600	(1) 241 in just and 59 supplied from Intendancy
- M. Tank Regiment (<i>with own means</i>)	-	-	-	(2) 267 in just and 33 supplied from the Intendancy
Libyan divisions Group Command	9	9 (A)	-	(3) 291 in just and 149 supplied from the Intendancy
- 1st Libyan division (<i>on foot with art. trucked</i>)	300	300 (1)	-	
-2nd Libyan division (<i>on foot with art. trucked</i>)	300	300 (2)	-	
Maletti Grouping reinforced by 1 bn. of 105/28 and with water autonomy of 15 days - <i>all trucked</i>	440	440 (3)	-	In complex the Intendancy furnaces wakes the following trucks
Army artigl. Grouping: - 2 groups of 149/13 -2 groups of 105/28 -3 groups of 100/17 (<i>with 2 unfoc included.</i>)	186	186 (A)	-	- to the div. Sirte 114 - to the 1st Libyan 59 - to the 2nd Libyan 33 - to the Maletti raggggr 149
Equipments to continuation -2 days of water	120	120 (A)	-	
-2 days of provisions	10	10 (A)	-	
-1 unfoc	194	194 (A)	-	
4 units c.l. (200 km. autonomy)	92	92 (A)	-	(4) Wanting to completely truck carry both the Libyan divisions - that includes infantries - the deficiency becomes of 1,924 trucks.
Totals	2,934	1,848	1,086	

Operation in North Africa Vol. 1

10% reserve	293	55 (A)	238	
Total	3,227	1,903	1,324 (4)	

In synthesis:

to the requirements of operating column -3227 - it cannot be supplied that in order less than 2/3 - 1324

Lack still nearly motor vehicles

10th ARMY COMMAND
TRUCK SITUATION ON 5 OCTOBER 1940 - XVIII

SERVICEABLE I UNSERVICEABLE

Major Units	Hv	Med	Lt	UnK	Total	Hv	Med	Lt	UnK	Total
Troops and serv. of A	64	58	56	2	180	30	75	2	-	107
Troops and serv. XXII C.A.	24	4	19	1	48	30	3	3	-	36
64th "Catanzaro" I.D.	15	-	20	4	39	39	-	27	-	66
4th CC.NN. div "3 Genn."	32	-	15	2	49	41	-	24	2	67
City of Tobruk	17	1	17	-	35	10	1	12	-	23
Trop. and serv. XXIII C.A	128	161	-	-	289	23	56	-	-	79
62nd "Marmarica" I.D.	101	76	-	-	177	22	53	-	-	75
63rd "Cirene" I.D	113	79	-	-	192	13	69	-	-	82
1st CC.NN. div. "23 March"	98	76	-	-	174	14	44	-	-	58
City of Bardia	2	7	-	-	9	1	3	16	-	20
Troops and serv. Libyan group	5	4	-	-	9	5	-	2	-	7
1st Libyan I. D	146	-	19	76	241	50	36	39	-	125
2nd Libyan I.D.	136	-	14	117	267	50	19	21	-	90
TOTALS	881	446	160	202	1709	328	359	146	2	835
"Maletti" Grouping	204	-	82	5	291	28	-	2	-	30
GENERAL TOTALS	1085	446	242	207	2000	356	359	148	2	865

00/1101/12

P.M. 34 C., 12 October 1940-XVIII

Situation of the efficient motor vehicles at disposition of the Intendancy (from the east towards the west).

1) BARDIA - N. 196 military trucks, of which n. 121 are part of note 5 water columns.

With the remaining n. 75 and not n. 55 of the 4th and 5th water column, temporary de-equipped, so to provide:

- a) supplying of provisions from Bardia to Bug-Bug for the troops of the occupied zone;
- b) service of the port of Bardia;
- c) service of the depot of Intendancy of Bardia;
- d) supplying of the garrisons from Bardia to Giarabub;
- e) firewood collection etc.

2) TOBRUK - n. 134 military trucks. It is provided essentially to:

- a) service of the Port of Tobruk;
- b) service of the warehouses of Intendancy of Tobruk;
- c) transport from Tobruk to Bardia;
- d) nearby services of the garrison of Tobruk and localities;
- e) transport of fuels from Ain el Gazala to Tobruk.

3) DERNIA - n. 200 civilian motor vehicles - n. 330 military trucks (comprised the former Cufra column) n. 156 military trucks of the Engineers.

A. With the civilian trucks it is provided essentially to:

- a) transport for the normal supplying from "Benghazi - Derna" to "Tobruk -Bardia": provisions - ammunitions - fuels - material of the engineers etc;
- b) service of the firewood.

B. With the military trucks it is provided essentially to:

- a) service of the Port of Derna and - eventually - Ain el Gazala;
- b) service of the warehouses of Intendancy of Derna;
- c) supplying of the warehouses and stage fuels distributors;
- d) nearby transports for the Agencies of the Garrison of Derna and garrisons (Berta, Martuba etc.);
- e) transport wounded and sick (in subsidy to the ambulances) in the rears;
- f) refueling extraordinary and urgent towards the forward zone;
- g) irregularly: transports of troops and isolated military units.

4) BENGHAZI - n. 92 military trucks.

It is provided essentially to:

a) service of the Port of Benghazi;

b) service of the warehouses of Intendancy of Benghazi;

c) services of the garrison of Benghazi and outskirts;

d) usual various transports (with character of urgency) from Benghazi to Derna and beyond.

The Intendancy, moreover, services of 35 civilian trucks of limited capacity and insufficient efficiency exclusively for services inside of Benghazi.

5) In course of arrival from Tripoli (IX Truck battalion), and from Barce (Caterpillar).

Already arrived to Derna:

- n. 62 trucks of the IX Group;

- n. 11 Caterpillar tractors with 26 trailers.

6) In total:

military trucks 970

civil trucks 200 (excluded the few of Benghazi)

total 1,170

Major general of the Intendente
E. GIORDANO

PREVIEWED EMPLOYMENT FOR THE TRUCKS AVAILABLE

A) 10th ARMY - <i>total availability</i>		2.000
(as from appendix n. 1)		
a) <i>Being necessary for the units that they remain in place:</i>	452	
(spaced out from Cirene to Barrani)		
b) <i>For truck borne elements operating column</i>		
Com, troops and serv. XXIII Libyan C. d'A	83	
Group div. - com.	9	
1st Libyan division		241
2nd Libyan division		267
Maletti Grouping	291	
arty. of army Grouping	186	
		1,077
c) For transport equipments to the continuation		
(excluded Maletti grouping that		
will have water autonomy of 15 days)		
2 days of water	120	
2 daily rations	10	
1 unfoc	194	
4 units consumptions c.l. (200 km. of autonomy)	92	
		416
d) reservoir		55
TOTAL		2,000

B) INTENDANCY N. A.

The Intendente general, after taken care of examination of the situation and the several requirements which he must bring to the front (see letter 00/1101/12 appendix 2) has fixed that 355 the *maximum* number of motor vehicles that can put today to disposition of the Comando Superiore, since receives in restitution the 155 motor vehicles yielded by the Comando Superiore engineers for the road work and the Capuzzo - Sidi Barrani aqueduct, and because it is freeing from the relative transports to the constitution of the advanced depots, to which would have to supply the Army.

The employment previewed for the 355 trucks of which over it is the following:

- in order to complete requirements 1st div. Libyan	59
- in order to complete requirements 2nd div. Libyan	33
- in order to complete requirements the Maletti Group.	149
- at the disposition Sirte division	<u>114</u>
	Total 355

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

24 October 1940 - A. XVIII

N. 01/1740 of Op protocol.

Answer to the sheet 3198 N. Op. of 18 October
annexed Map N. 1

Subject: Offensive operations in Egypt.

To His Ecc. the Chief of General Staff
Rome

I. Buy action of as much as you have communicated to me with sheet 3198 Op., of which I have already marked received.

Since it is *materially impossible*, for the moment, the shipment from the Motherland of the 1300 trucks being necessary, will try with every expedient to organize all existing means in Cyrenaica and those of which the arrival is announced to me, so as to get the maximum rendering yes to reach very soon possible degree of such preparation that allows me to resume the offensive operations in Egypt.

Granting me the availability of the factor time, will while facilitate me the solution of the three fundamental premises of the preparation: road, aqueduct and caterpillar.

The work on the street and of the aqueduct between Capuzzo and Sidi Barrani proceed with more and more intense rhythm, for as much disturbed daily by enemy aviation: they have been taken to adequate measures of air defense and cruises of protection of our fighters.

The collection of the local caterpillar trains is in course; once completed with the shipment of that are being collected in the homeland and that it is necessary to accelerate to the maximum - will allow me to save some hundred of trucks, that added to what is sent in course and from the recoveries - of which it is to be hoped will increase the yield for effect of the relative provisions to the repairs and to the shipment of replacement parts - I hope give the way to me to motorize one entire division.

Moreover the *creation of advanced depots* - to which it is already placed in hand - *will considerably lighten the logistic weight to the continuation of the operating units* and it will give a certain *elasticity to me also in the maneuver of means of intendancy*.

II. While, since *in the problem of the preparation* another element is becoming part - the planned shipment to Cyrenaica of *a Germanic armored unit* - I wish to give you a note of my thought with regard to.

Premise that during the *visit of general von Thoma* - carried out in *record time* - has not been able to analyze the problem in depth, neither discussed to bottom several the concrete aspects.

Von Thoma, demanded from me *to cover in car the coastal strip from Bardia to Sidi Barrani* - since *he put the feet to earth* and he saw the land, as I have just said to him - resolutely has refused, encamping urgent reasons that recalled him. It has been limited, therefore, to *giving a glance to the land from the high*, only until Bardia.

If he had accepted my invite, he would have been delayed is true of a day returning, but he would have had the possibility *to see not a single tank*, but *all the medium tank grouping*, that just in that day moved from Bug Bug to Barrani was, *covering the dune zone distinctly*.

In any case, in the short hours that he had stopped at Cirene - watch in hand - I have made to above all consider the *logistic problem* and before every other that *one of water and fuels* to the continuation, preferring that, to the case, *some means of fire also increasing to the tankers (water) and the tankers (fuel) diminished*.

While, examinee the constitution of the armored division in word, a figure jumps at once to the eyes, that one of the motor vehicles: *2250 for only 13,000 men* - about as few - *as many as we have, in total, among the 10th Army and the intendancy!*

The number of the motorcyclists seems excessive: beyond 800; it could be reduced, increasing instead the armored car, of whose optimal rendering in this special physical atmosphere luminous tests *from the enemy side have been had*.

To part that, the deepened examination of the program traced from the several commission, has brought to light some issues of which I have reassumed the essential terms in the memorandum arrived here.

In short, only the true, *great difficulty is that one of unloading, given the limited ability of the Libyan ports* - that will be more reduced during the winter - and that it will affect remarkably not only the time in which we will be able to have to foot to work the *German armored division*, but also on the *reinforcing for our troops*.

III. It does not have doubt to you that the employment in *Cyrenaica of the armored division in word* - therefore rich of means - will strongly constitute the best element for breakthrough, *especially if employed for Marsa Matruh*. Because,

the task, that it is above all necessary just for the march on Matruh, for which we lack exactly one unit of the sort.

It is easy therefore, to preview now end that the main merit of the success of the operation would be from this armored division.

Then they are asked me if, politically, were it not convenient to avoid such assistance or at least limit this to the last phase of the campaign.

Therefore I have studied the possibility to constitute one some unit similar with the medium armor already in Cyrenaica.

In fact, with here existing means and in arrival, armored unit will be able to be given to life to one having a sure consistency. For accomplish the efficiency, but, it would still have to endow with two elements: a regiment of three motorized infantry battalions and a unit of armored cars.

I do not have way of providing them with the means at my disposition: the three motorized battalions would absorb many of the motor vehicles that will serve in order to motorize a division, as I have said above.

I propose therefore that he is to send me, taking them from the Army of the Po, a motorized regiment of infantry - complete (possibly reinforced some unit of Solothurn tank destroyer rifles, than they have demonstrated themselves much effective).

For the armored car task that would not have to be difficult to obtain from the Germans some hundred of the machines, limiting to this their assistance.

IV. I will not even about the amount of resources necessary for pushing further, from Matruh forward, when it is be a matter of moving on the Delta, where we expect a mass of about 15 divisions, positions prepared with bridges to be thrown and the need to be followed by the water. - Since the water duct that is laboriously constructing from Capuzzo to Barrani will not be able to stop it here, nor at Marsa Matruh, but will have follow us for all the march.

With regard to this the supreme commander of engineers is making the relative calculations, that they become hyperbolic as means employment of every kind and types.

Shipment, while, this very day the relative plan to the aqueduct Fort Capuzzo - Sidi Barrani - Marsa Matruh, and I beg strongly, Excellency, to obtain the indispensable raw material for realizing: iron.

V. Concluding:

1) I assured V.E. that every effort will be made in order to use to the maximum the time and means to my disposition to the aims of the preparation for the advance on Marsa Matruh.

2) To do without, at this stage of the operations, the German assistance *I ask only* sending an motorized infantry regiment, complete, and a unit with several hundred armored cars.

3) The further prosecution of the offensive operations is a complex problem in all its terms, of obvious *exceptional* importance and whose solution could be obtained only if *we will decide of adequate means in order to smash the enemy resistances and in order to tame the hundreds of kilometers of desert that separate to us from the objective.*

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

Attached to sheet T1 01/1740
Op. of the 24-X-940-XVIII

MEMORANDUM RELATIVE TO THE PROGRAM OF PRINCIPLE
REALIZED TO ROME FOR THE SHIPMENT OF A
GERMAN ARMORED UNIT TO N. A.

1) Not is *sensitive difficulties for as much concerns the constitution of the German Intendancy, the sections of disembarkation of Tripoli and eventually of Benghazi, of the bases of reinforcements to us entrusted and those advances.*

Also the *bread making* does not seem to demand provisions of particular relief: the shipment from Italy of a *score of ovens*, with relative staff, will be sufficient to assure such service.

2) Particular consideration deserves, instead, on the following issues:

- *unskilled workers.*

I think that the work of cargo and unloading in the ports, rather than to *working units they are entrusted to local Libyan experts, integrated from civil harbour workers opportune. That is in order not to put our soldiers to the command of the Germans, for hard work jobs, is also in order to avoid the unfavorable impression to our prestige*

that the fact would not lack to produce in the aboriginal element.

It is to keep in mind that moreover because of the *unhealthy conditions of the equipment, our workers would not make good figure.*

Nothing instead observing approximately *the allocation to the bases of supplying of a well framed nuclei and in conditions for figuring well.*

Rendering of the Libyan ports.

It is noted that in this period the ports of N.A. *do not succeed to satisfy all our needs with the wished quickness. With to advancing of the bad season is from a previewing greater contraction of the rendering. The sensitive increase of the traffic which had to in flow of relative the German armored division and the reinforcing, will carry a delay inexorably in disembarks, the less sensitive for Tripoli, more emphasized for Benghazi, is for minor the degree of performance, is for the greater probability of enemy aerial offenses against the convoys and harbor works.*

However nothing it will be neglected in order to reduce the lessening, also in the operations of unloading, the consequent delays to a greater in flow of steamboats.

Tripoli port defense.

It goes then held present that they are *not excluding at all from naval and aerial offenses against the port of Tripoli, especially when the enemy comes to know that they disembark German troops there.*

It is therefore necessary to think next to the *strengthening of the air defense and that naval (this last entrusted to only 2 batteries of 190 with much limiting munitions and of which not there is no availability even in the home land).*

For the A/A defense two groups of 88/56 are necessary at least others, beyond that one in arrival; would appear per the naval defense much convenient artilleries on ships (type S. Giorgio at Tobruk).

Fixed workshops.

It is not possible to implant fixed workshops at Bardia, locality a lot exposed to the enemy attacks and deprives of resources; Benghazi answers much better to the goal. In any case, the possibility will be examined to arrange some workshop at Tobruk or in other near locality.

The Ministry Of War
S.I.M

Rome, 23 October 1940

REINFORCES ARRIVING AFTER MID AUGUST IN TOTAL
TO EGYPT, SUDAN and KENYA

EGYPT

Between the middle of August and the middle of October arrived in Egypt - via the Red Sea or the Mediterranean - various convoys. Other convoys are in navigation with probable destination of Egypt.

I. Convoys arriving via the Red Sea.

According to the outcomes of this Service, are up to date arrived in Egypt 7 convoys for a total number of approximately 180 steamships among which approximately a quarter of average and gross tonnage.

According to reliable calculations the cited convoys have disembarked in the ports of Egypt not less than 132,000 men therefore approximately distinguished: 40,000 British, 45,000 Anzac, 43,000 Indians and 4,000 South Africans.

For the detail data see the attached appendix* in which for every convoy the dates of arrival, the number of the quantitative men and of materials disembarked are reported.

The news of which over and the data for the compilation of the appendix have been deduced beyond that from the messages arriving from various sources, also from the examination of the aerial observations, from the study of the routes, the calculation of the distances and from compute of the times.

As far as the total of the troops and the materials disembarked, the marked figures is from considered approximate for defect rather than for excess, in as much as of various steamships have been only computed for the troops and the materials observed in disembarkation while the real ability to transport could considerable greater. Moreover some convoy may have escaped observation of the informers and aviation.

* Omitted

II. Convoys arriving via the Mediterranean.

They are not had with regard to precise news; it is thought but that to first of September there arrived, between Alexandria and Port Said, 17 steamships presumably cargos of troops, and that on 29 September have been unloaded at Alexandria, of 6 steamships, approximately 45 thousand tons of war material.

III. Convoys in navigation.

To mid October 4 convoys were spotted in navigation and precisely:

1) a large convoy, probably departed at the end of August from the port of the Scozia with aboard imprecise contingent, but remarkable, of British troops, directed to Egypt via Capetown. As such could identify in that convoy 40 steamships, found by our aviation the 20th current in the Red Sea with route 330° and attacked them, the next day, with aero-naval action;

2) An important convoy of imprecise number of steamships loaded with troops and war material, left the 15th current from Bombay and directed probably to Suez where, following the Socotra-Aden route, it would have to reach the first of November. And to think that such convoy could transport an Indian contingents estimated from some source to 30-40 thousand men;

3) A large convoy of 47 steamships that has left Gibraltar on 9 October with western route. The same convoy found day of the 11th current 150 miles to south of Cape S. Vincenzo with route to the south;

4) A convoy of 2-3 steamships, which 2 of 15,000 tons, with aboard approximately 8,000 English or Scot departed from Gibraltar 19 October and directed probably to Egypt via Capetown.

I compute approximate of the forces present in Egypt.

Held account of the troops flowing into Egypt via sea between mid August and mid October and considering that in Egypt to first of August - with the in flow of the forces of Palestine - the effectives were being estimated 130,000 men, can be deduced with sufficient approximation that currently not less than 260,000 men (Egyptians included) do garrison the country.

To such forces the contingents in above-mentioned navigation aboard of the 4 convoys, comprising beyond 100 steamships of varied tonnage must be added currently.

THE CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF

on, 27 October 1940

Memorandum for the Duce

In the next encounter that I will have With the Marshal Keitel, the argument who will assume main importance will be the action towards Egypt.

He will be well to preview the limits of this action so as to be able to introduce the perfectly framed problem without that there is then the possibility of surprise and affect from both sides.

1) Situation of the force.

We presently have in Libya 230,000 men. A part of them, and perfectly organized, will have to remain on the boarder to Tunisia. The situation in north-Africa is so unstable especially after taken command of General Weygand, our declared enemy, that it demands of being always ready to whatever event. I think that an army at least 80,000 men must gravitate towards the Libyan-western frontier. 150,000 men for the operations against Egypt remain therefore available.

Given the enormous length of our lines of communication, the personnel used after the services will assume impressive proportions and is therefore prudent to fix in the figure of 120,000 men, the combatant true availability of on the eastern frontier.

And this availability will diminish still as will proceed towards east, for the necessity conveniently protect our lines of supply.

According to the most recent information the English have assembled in Egypt 250,000 men. Since they can draw troops from their numerous possessions (India - Africa South - Australia) and that their line of communication of the Red Sea can be subordinate to disturbances, but not to be interrupted, is natural to also admit that to the end of the year they will not less have in Egypt than 300,000 men, making abstraction from the forces Egyptians.

English therefore will have amassed in the delta of the Nile forces sure double of those which we currently have in Eastern Libya.

In such situation the force contribution that the Germans would want to give - that is a light division of tanks - does not move much the force relationship.

It would be necessary our shipment of at least 200,000 men in order to alter the said relationship to our favor.

2) Defensive Situation and of the armaments.

It is now known that the English despite having done so for some time to set up a fortified camp which possess photo surveys, in Marsa Matruh, are busily working to fortify the western edge of the delta.

And as for this work have had time, materials to work site and workers available, it is clear that we will be faced with one or more lines of defense that will require the use of numerous heavy artillery with plenty of ammunition.

The heavy artillery in Libya, consisting of some group of 140, 105 and 100 is neither numerically nor for power gauges sufficient for the task that lies ahead. Should therefore sending artillery, the number and caliber will be determined after study of the photographs of the British lines.

3) Situation of the theater of operations.

Currently we being at Sidi Barrani the situation in care to the special desert theater of operations, is favorable for us.

When we will occupy Marsa Matruk the situation will be almost equal. We will have that is a lot to cover 250 km. of desert in order to reach the English first lines. But to notice that English have a railroad facilitates that they use for supplying.

Every step that we will make beyond Marsa Matruk, is as far as the land to our disadvantage. Neither can be conceived a march of at least 300,000 men with numerous artilleries, tanks and other plentiful materials, without first to have established at Marsa Matruk and subsequently to 100 km. from said true localities magazines depots that allow with short travels the supplying of the troops.

4) Possibility of the shipment of reinforcement to Libya.

He urges in absolute way that is the possibility to send over to Libya the force and materials.

We lack the ship being necessary for transport lacks - the equipment and the safety of the ports lacks, effects the disembarkation, lacks the light warships for the escorts.

Feeding then a force therefore conspicuous in Libya is a task advanced to our current availabilities and that in any case the presence of the English fleet in the Mediterranean would be always now very risky.

Conclusion.

1) The problem to attack the English forces in the delta of the Nile, given all the considerations made, is not solvable for us.

2) The aid that the Germans can give to us cannot resolve in any way the issue since the more serious deficiencies regard ship, ports, safety of supplies.

3) The task that we can ourselves be proposed and be resolved is that one to occupy Marsa Matruk, in order to allow to our aviation adequately fighter escort, to render the stay of the English fleet to Alexandria difficult.

4) Arriving at Marsa Matruk, the first care will have to be that one to arrange that base defensively and the rear line of communication so as to be sure against returns offensives of the enemy.

5) The aid that can be given by the Germans is to seek essentially in aviation dive bombers with relative fighters.

If the Germans insist for make also the armored division will before be necessary to explain they well the limits and the scopes of our action, in the terms that over I have looked.

These the considerations that I have thought necessary to express to You Duce, and await of Your decisions.

BADOGLIO

The Ministry Of War.
S.I.M

Rome, 25 October 1940

"It has been manifested, in these recent times, positive symptoms and indications that they make to think the imperial General Staff to have intention to assume offensive initiatives.

"Such operations, lead mainly in the Mediterranean, would have to stretch Italy to strike before that the other Axis power has taken to more balance foot in Southeastern Europe and over all before that the uncertain friendships of Turkey, Greece and Iraq, are changed in effective susceptible neutralities of hostile developments.

"The symptoms that give to shape and substance to the shown hypothesis of next British offensive can therefore listed:

- the increase in men and materials (especially mechanized and aerial) of the forces in Egypt whose effectives will reach as many as before 300.000 men and 7-800 aircraft;
- the presence in the Cairo of the British Minister of war that - coinciding with the arrival in the ports Egyptians of one new Australian Division is understanding to influence on the Egyptian public opinion in order to provoke a pronouncements of the Arabic world against the Axis;
- The removal - once the danger of the invasion of Great Britain faded - of the epicenter of the war from the North Sea to the Mediterranean;
- the nomination of new military heads: the commanders of aviation, the fleet and the metropolitan forces, thought - according the official version - as the most adapted to put in action the new plans offensives;
- The reports of the collected Ethiopian outlaws in the Sudan with the rebellious ones of the Empire;
- The in flow of new reinforcements to Sudan and Kenya that they make to elevate the present forces in the Co-dominion to 80,000 men and those of the Kenya to approximately 90,000 men.

"According as much as it turns out from several sources, the probable eventual direction of the next British counter offensive could be:

- 1) Against our forces of Sidi el Barrani in order to obtain a first land success;

2) Against I.E.A. where English more still count on the internal rebellion and on the progressive exhaustion of our resources thought not easy replaced;

3) Against Casablanca, besides that for seizing of the Atlantic base that along with that one of Freetown, in order to give to vigor to the De Gaulle movement in North Africa;

4) It is finally from considering a sure British invasion of Crete, in the eventuality the occupation from part of the powers of the Axis of Greek bases of the Aegean

"The planned British offensives can be understood connected with the ambiguous attitude of the French authorities of North-Africa where the presence of General Weygand is destined, As already has been marked, to upgrade the will of resistance

"To confirmation of that from messages that General Weygand, holding a meeting in Tunisia of the civil and military heads of the Regency, has pronounced the 15th current a tending speech to excite the minds, representing the sad conditions of occupied France that it suffers under the thumb German and systematically is stripped and robbed.

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA

Marshal of Italy
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

Benghazi, 29 October 1940 - XVIII

n. 50 R.P.

DUCE!

Your letter of the 26th current was delivered to me on my arrival here today, for a short visit, by Colonel Castriota, commander of the Royal Carabinieri. It was transmitted from the Ministry of the Air Force with n. 26/1040.

The occasion to answer with the maximum solicitude is offered to me therefore.

I do not hide to You, Duce, that the document reaches me like a lighting blow, when that is the letter of Marshal Badoglio of the 18th current, in answer to my last report, had by now given me again the tranquility about the time factor necessary for the preparation of future operations.

However, strongly of my serene conscience, I will try to respond to you in a precise way that the complexity of the argument can grant.

I feel in the first place, Duce, the necessity to reject in way clean and absolute the doubt that I never have felt myself or feels to me unjustly here confined or set aside.

Whichever source this grossest and cowardly hint can be there reached, can find from my part, only protection of the anonymous.

It is true but the contrary, and that is that I have felt myself invested of a mission of highest importance and responsibility that I have faced with my customary boldness.

I have more also said of with the precise intention that was reported, that never of front to a delicate task therefore I could have approached just for false amour, or for ambition, or feeling except noble, to risk a whatever as without being convinced which judge on the place, than it was very measured.

If such affirmation has been disfigured, this re-enters in the field of the human and interested contortions of the Truth who

not for first your in the life I have had to meet, as it is common heritage of every man of action. With the aggravating circumstance for me that the temperament makes to reject me disdainfully, for instinct, all which is fruit of fool and falsehood, in order to continue instead to only fight with the arms of the loyalty and the sincerity.

Weapons weak in truth against the masters of the contrary method.

You know, Duce, than of the 16 months of preparation which I pointed out, not compete, which directed actor, only four.

The actions office will be able to always put in evidence which it was the state of the things to the Libyan eastern frontier under all the technical points of view, organizational and moral, when I have assumed the Government and the Comando Superiore of Libya.

In these four months the situation is completely reverse transforming a atmosphere of defeat into an auspice of victory.

Victory but achievable according a very precise program to put into effect and that I have seen to myself very clear and clearly before, the first day.

Having lived for twenty years approximately the life of the desert the difficulties of one could not in fact not appear to me in obvious way enterprise without president in history, which that one to move metropolitan masses of tens and tens of thousand men, in land absolutely desert, lacking in every resource.

The colonial logistic factor that has always burdened in preponderant way also in the small operations of police, would have recorded in adds degree on the execution of a plan which that one of the invasion of Egypt, from the West, against another metropolitan army, strong and trained.

All that put in relationship with the scarcest of means not to mention disposition for the road haulage of the troops.

These terms of the problem if they could escape to a profound commander of the special theater of operations, were not sure possible that this happened for me and that therefore they did not record in determining my concept of conduct of the campaign, whose difficulty to me you appeared obvious the beginning since.

Duce! in a my sheet of the 29 July last, directed to the Chief of General Staff, I, supporting the opportunity to send back the beginning of the operations, indicated in fact as first objective Marsa Matruh.

You know the genesis through which he went himself to Barrani, taking the movements when the potentiality in order to reach Matruh did not exist and the arrest on ineluctably necessary Barrani yields with the consequent necessity of a long preparation which that one in course, in order to proceed along without to run adventures.

This I have put exactly in evidence in my last report, and today, to my judgment, not there is other to make that to continue

in this way holding account exactly of the important enemy preparation.

For as far as the issue of means I have put in evidence in sent documents which it is the truth, that today nearly it is unchanged.

I do not think therefore in this headquarters to descend to demonstrations of detail.

The truth is, Duce, than the war that is being it's hardest for all the factors that characterize it (sea - hyperbolic distances - lack of every resource - the firewood must even be transported from the Cyrenaica Gebel to Barrani) and that, in relation to these difficulties, it goes considered the relative term: *time*.

The Germans that show of surprise would not say different if they were here, they that in the organization they are methodical and meticulous until the improbable. They, than, demands for assistance on the valley of the Arq, hurried at once to make present from Grenoble, than other thing it was to advance with the armored units along the plain, other infiltrate in the alpine valleys.

Another, much more difficult, is the desert action.

Who, Duce, he said that the morale of the troops affected by the delay in the move, consciously lies, and do not know how to appreciate the spirit.

The troops know that if I do not move, I have my good reasons.

They have the most absolute confidence in me, their commander.

This confidence I cannot betray them, neither will they ever betray me, to risk of whichever sacrifice of same me.

And afford me also to say, Duce, as my place of command is not the rear. It is in the just point in order to push along who is to the front, and who flows to you from the rears.

It is placed in locality where, dates the distances, is allowed totally to practicing them.

When I have held him for fifteen days at Tobruk, his operation succeeded for against much more difficulty and with only one arm.

All the troops truly available for the eastern frontier (six metropolitan divisions plus the two Libyans: total eight) less the *Sirte* in reserve at Beda Littorio, is located by now between Tobruk and Barrani. (Of the divisions of eastern Tripolitania (V Army) for note cannot itself be made assignment for the frontier requirements with that western).

The army commander is and he cannot be at Bardia.

The commanders of army corps and of division are in the immediate device of their units, that is in desert full load under the awnings.

The network of the connections is the key for the command function and I from Cirene can speak with Barrani, as from Cirene, connected

with the units more advances, I have directed and commanded until the end the particular the operation of Barrani.

No advantage would draw therefore the action of Comando Superiore if I transferred the headquarters to Tobruk or Derna, with the aggravating circumstance of the smaller serenity for the work.

Arriving at this point, Duce, I must say to you that in thirty years of risk and war I never have receded neither from the danger, nor from the responsibility.

But since You, if not error, you place me in Your letter a clear dilemma:

- or to hurry the march,
- or to ask to be recalled;

I must respond to you with the maximum serenity:

1) that if you saw however the possibility to satisfy to the first condition, no doubt can be there that I would make it without other.

But I have made my deductions and pulled the conclusions on elements of the problem that are not changed, yes by allow me before the indicated limits of time.

2) but since that can be consequence of a wrong appraisal that I cannot perceive, then, Duce, my must be the only one, and that is that one of to ask you of being recalled and being replaced. Who will come to my place, examinee the former problem a new or they will see possible developments that to me they escape and will act in consequence; or, this not being, will inherit the organization which I am giving life and he will employ it wisely, will obtain with certainty the means that to me has not been granted, will operate at the opportune moment and will win.

In both the cases to me will be sufficient satisfaction to have sacrificed my all, my past, my amour just to the good of the Motherland. Of other part a mission which that one that is entrusted to me cannot serenely be acquitted if with the certainty not to collect the full and absolute confidence of the Leader.

I enclose a chart of the real losses endured by the English armored division during the movement on Barrani, which it turns out from the enemy interceptions.

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
GRAZIANI

13 October 1940-XVIII

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

Military Information Office

Chart of mechanized means knocked out combat during the period the September -8 October 1940 - XVIII.

(data compiled from interceptions)

TYPE	Destroyed	Evacuated	Immobilized or broken down	Missing	Total
Armored car	11	1	1	-	13
Tanks	10	40	11	17	78
Trucks	4	5	12	1	22
Motorcycles	-	1	-	-	1
Motor vehicles of imprecise type	-	1	1	-	2
	25	48	25	18	116

REPORT OF THE MEETING NEAR TENUTASI
THE JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF
10 NOVEMBER 1940
(*extract of the report*)

Are present:

Ecc Ubaldo SODDU - Maj. Gen. - undersecretary of Minister of War.

Ecc Mario ROATTA - Maj. Gen. - undersecretary of G.S. of the Army.

Ecc Edoardo SOMIGLI - Adm. - undersecretary of G.S. of the R. Marina.

Ecc Giuseppe SANTORO - Maj. Gen. - undersecretary of G.S. R. Aeronautica.

Ecc Quirino Armellini Gen. - common agent.

Secretaries:

Col. A.A. r.n. Ferdinand RAFFAELLI head of operations section.

Lt. Federico MOHRHOFF - stenographer.

The sitting begins at 09:30 hours.

Badoglio - The meeting for dealing of the invasion on Corfù and of the shipment of reinforcements to Albania.

Ecc Roatta - Circa the acceleration of the transports to Albania, the situation is the following (reads the report).

Supermarina and Superesercito are proposed to improve the situation employing three armed motor-ships, some existing German steamboats in our ports...

Ecc Somigli - We must put Them in order and would have had to serve for the transport of the German mot. div. for Libya, about which it is not spoken more. But the Germans want to prepare their steamboats, that they would be armed with German personnel.

We would have to ask to Germany if we may use them.

Ecc Badoglio - This we will do later on, as soon as the Duce arrives.

Ecc Roatta - If we want to accelerate the transports, we must divert other transports directed to the I.N.A.

Ecc Badoglio - Than the advance on Marsa Matruh is made in December or in January, at present, it is of little importance. In order now the urgent problem and most important is Greece.

(...)

Ecc Badoglio - the problem is never that simple.

I pray Soddu to report to the Duce as much as of the following: we had promised a consist increase of trucks to I.N.A. for the march on Marsa Matruh; I propose to the Duce that these shipments are suspended for now and are made to all flow to Albania.

In Albania moreover he will have to be at once disembarked the Bari div.; for now we will not take care ourselves of Corfù; we will dedicate instead as much as we can subsidize all the logistic services and send other troops in Albania.

(...)

(omitted)

COMANDO SUPREMO - JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF

Operations section - Sec. 1

N. 3368 of prot. *secret*

7 November 1940 - A. XIX

To His Excellency the Marshal of Italy

Rodolfo GRAZIANI

Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the I.N.A.

Object: Operations in I.N.A.

After the beginning of the operations against Greece the line of strategic conduct of the war can be thought therefore defined:

- 1) From Albania aerial offensive action -with the land goal of the complete occupation of Greece;
- 2) From the Mother Country aerial offensive action in support to the offensive action in Greece, addressing especially against the land and naval systems of the enemy;
- 3) From Libya it sets in land -aerial action limited to the conquest of Marsa Matruh, from where then, arranged firm defense, to carry out a active lively aerial action on the port of Alexandria in order to render the life to the English fleet impossible;
- 4) In the Aegean the airplane-land-Naval defensive action, understanding to the maintenance of the colonies and aerial and naval offensive action against the English and Greek fleets;
- 5) In the Empire aerial action - ground understanding essentially to last;
- 6) For the Naval protection of the traffic with Albania and North Africa and naval forces in power for oppose to the eventual offenses from part of the enemy forces.

With the results:

- that the main operation is conducted that has as the objective the entire occupation of Greece, which will absorb a great amount of troops (from 20 to 25 divisions) and of

materials and will engage the greater part of naval means, for war and cargo, in order to carry out the transports and to assure the connections;

- that the operations in Egypt, with objective limited to the occupation of Marsa Matruh, they will have to be adapted to the new situation.

To continuation and confirmation of my 3542 sheet Op. dated 2nd current month, I ask You therefore, Excellency, of wanting see again Your plans more, adapting the demands to the new limited requirements than present operating character and holding who the starters of suitable motor vehicles from the General Staff of the Army with sheet 09600 / 341 on date 1st current month not suffer varying in consequence of the current situation.

Also relative the operating plans to the Tunisian frontier (I refer to Your sheet 01/1775 in dated 25 October c.y.) they will have to be adapted to the limited means available for that theater.

The Chief of General Staff
BADOGLIO

THE GENERAL GOVERNOR OF LIBYA
Marshal of Italy
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

14 November 1940-XIX

n. 69 R.ta Personal

To His Excellency the Marshal of Italy
Pietro BADOGLIO
Chief of the General Staff
Rome

I have the charge, Excellency, of receipt n. 3668/Op. and to You give assurance that all my desire, of the General Staffs, the troops are stretched towards the objective that was pointed out to us.

We all are penetrated of the serious moment that is crossing and ready to giving all of same we in order to allow to achieve positive results.

The troops marching on foot with the minimum of motor transport, without baggage train, mountain trucks for the supplying from the centers to the periphery of the alignments.

It all will be reduced lessened indispensable but in order to give life to the battle it is necessary to have the certainty to realize the head of the alignment with an imposing fire mass for the first castling on the *Gebel* that dominates Marsa Matruh and its entrenched field; with to one armored brigade and at least one motorized division to throw similarly at once forward.

In order to obtain this the means now available *are not sufficient*. It is necessary that the motor vehicles indicated to us by the G.S. of the Army reach here not beyond the end of the month of which to sheet 09600/341 on date 1st current that You cite in Your 3668/Op.

They are necessary the Katerpillar for us of which to the same sheet that already they would turn out on dock at Naples.

The replacement parts and the machine-shop trucks are necessary to us of which the same Director of the Motorization, Colonel AMIONE, he has had to recognize the ineluctable necessity in the report that I enclose to You and that now the definitive point on this *vexata quaestio* of the motor vehicles here available.

It is indispensably necessary all that minimum to us other in order to move a so imposing mass of men in the desert.

it is necessary the shipment to Us of the pipes for the aqueduct beyond Barrani that Dalmine is preparing.

The road and the aqueduct for Barrani go forward. In order to realize these two absolutely necessity have been made efforts and sacrifices of every kind:

From the far Tripolitania to the Cyrenaica they have been *exhumation and transported* to work 120 kilometers of pipes from the concessions, from the aqueducts, anywhere. Tubes of varied diameter with all the relative difficulties to the joints, etc. Their have been including requirement without mercy caterpillar, trailer trucks, seams, breakers. Other shape of local activity has been paralyzed almost everywhere.

The populations follow in silence the orders, while the hunger strikes more than in a place to the doors because of the difficulty of the transports of provisions from the Mother Country.

Metropolitans and aborigines give a magnificent example of discipline, sacrifice and obedience. Advancing our victorious to raise the moral of all and will contribute also to hold arouses that one of the Mother Country.

I ask You, Excellency, yes to make the means prepared or in preparation to Naples to are more soon loaded in two or three special steamboats and immediately diverted to Tripoli.

I remind You (I am lawful also to make this when it is in clearance the supreme interest of the Mother Country, that protect You) the outcry that You have launch to me in Your march on Addis Abeba, to which making unheard of efforts for the coming encounter I did not remain deaf in order to complete Your Victory who was only then total.

I send you general GIORDANO who has the assignment to preside over the boarding of means.

It will be able give you a voice all which You will want ask without reservation from part mine as I have always authorized to make from the part of all the officers of the G.S. sent us bearing my documents.

With this my letter I have said last the my word.

My effort cannot go beyond the limits of the possible, the humanity and the most decided Will.

I would not want be me at the tragic moment to have realized with huge road and water effort, and to still have to delay for the rest.

Then the sure responsibility of the events will not be able to only fall back on me in front to the motherland that is only eternal.

The Marshal of Italy
Advanced Commander Armed Forces A.S.
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

COMANDO SUPREMO
CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

4156/Op.

24 November 1940-XIX

*His Excellency Advanced Commander FF. AA.
Italian North Africa*

I answer to sheet 69 in dated 14th current month in which you ask about:

- the motor vehicles and tractors marked in starter in sheet 9600/341 dated on the 10th current of the General Staff R. Army;

- the vehicles for automotive repairs indicated in the report 10 November, so compiled;

- the pipes for the aqueduct beyond Barrani. I have intentional given exact account of the way as they come satisfied your demands and I have assessed that:

- the motor vehicles and the tractors in issue already have been sent or loaded on the steamships, but their departure has received a remarkable delays also, in attended of your authorization to the shipment to the ports of Libya (v. sheet 22082 in dated 14 November of the Higher Transportation Directorate);

- to complement of as much as already sent previously, the General Staff R. Army has sent the specialized laborers, the operative workshops and machines now demands;

-all requests for the aqueduct were accepted and have found the funds and raw materials required: related supplies for the most part have already been made and in particular, of the 230 Km. of pipes, a part is already loaded on steamers, one part is to the ports waiting for cargo.

While I observe that, also proceeding from it sent in course, the availability efficient motor vehicles in eastern Libya on 10 November, according the data from you transmitted (3180 units), appears already much next to the goal requirements from you in the memo 01/1500 of 15 October last (3227 unit), I cannot do less than to find that the only field in which further efforts appear necessary is essentially that one of the marine transports for the employment in part for unloading in the ports of Libya and acceleration in the restitution to the Mother country of the empty steamships.

Respond with regard to the situation presented there in the cited sheet 22082 of the Higher Transportation Directorate and I recommend every activity in this field.

The Chief of General Staff
BADOGLIO

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF THE LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 3300/V of prot.

P.M. 11-C 3 December 1940-XIX

To His Excellency the Chief of General Staff

MILITARY MAIL 21

Responding point for point to Yours n. 4156 of the 24 November c.y.:

1) With sheet n. the 22082 of 14 November S.M.R.E. communicated, among other things, that they were still at Naples to that date in awaiting departure the very steamboats and that is:

- *Amsterdam* and *Capo Orso*: as it turns out from the note A) to the sheet annexed to the foretold sheet, the authorization to the departure had been given for me since from the day 8 November. The steamboats are to arrive on Tripoli 17 November.

- *Giovanna Maria*: the authorization to the departure was given since from 2 November. The steamboat arrived to Tripoli 17 November.

- *Marangona*: it did not come forwarded some demand for starting since it was marked in departing directly to the G.S.R.A. as ship sent to find the cargo of other steamboat aground.

- *Col di Lana*, *Bosforo*, *Caffaro*: the authorization to the departure was given 14 November. The steamboats *Bosforo* and *Caffaro*, are arrived 25 November; *Col di Lana* it must still arrive.

- *Maria* and *Aquitania*: I have demanded them started 21 November; still they have not arrived.

- *Capo Vita* and *Gritti*: I have given the single authorization in these days since I thought that those demands had to reach previously and I did not want to congest the port of Tripoli.

Moreover I make present that between the 6 and 29 November I have asked, beyond the previous ones, also the started of 8 steamboats with cargos for civilians and another 4 with military cargos.

2) I still do not have news of the arrival of the specialized laborers, for the workshops and of the operative machines. I represent the necessity to hurry the bulk of the delivery of this personal and material.

3) In the cares of the materials for the aqueduct, thank for how much have been made and attend the arrival of the steamboats "*Tripovich*", "*Sabaudia*", "*Scaroni*" on which the material are boarded.

4) For how much it has drawn to the total availability of motor vehicles, I think some clarification necessary.

The marked requirements with memo 01/1500 dated 15 October -3227 unit - one only refers to the operating column then previewed.

From document C, to the foretold memo, one finds, in fact, that the total of the efficient motor vehicles was of 2970 and that is: 2000 of the 10th Army (appendix 1 to document C) and 970 attached with Intendancy N.A. - beyond 200 civilians (appendix 2) - in total 1903 (2nd column of document C), since the difference 1067 the more 200 civilians represented, as they still represent, the minimal share necessary and hardly sufficient in order to assure the life of the units who remain firm and the normal operation of the intendancy services.

The figure of the *further requirements* for the operating column in 1324 motor vehicles (3227-1903 emerged therefore).

To 10 November the total of the efficient motor vehicles, 3180, was hardly 210 units advanced to that one of 15 October, therefore the further requirements for the operating column from 1324 to 15 October reduced to 10 November to 1114 motor vehicles.

As you see we were still very far from the goal.

For how much it then reflects the new arrivals of motor vehicles, I signal that a part of the trucks that arrived is of requisition and several of them are inefficient. I cite the case of the *Amsterdam* that has disembarked 120 motor vehicles of which only 84 efficient; remaining had to be started in workshop for being repaired.

5) As far as finally the part of the marine transports employed by me, I assure that all the possible one is being made and will be made in order to accelerate to their maximum drainage and the restitution of the empty steamboats. I make present but that such hurried operations could be a lot if the cargos were made in the departure ports with greater care, essentially, avoiding of intermingle the kinds that must be unloaded at Tripoli with those destined ones to the ports of the Cyrenaica. It has been taken place also recently that the motor vehicles - than as are noted were all unloaded at Tripoli - arriving with the steamboat *Amsterdam* under tons of other materials destined to Eastern Libya.

* * *

I have requested with telegram n. 3261cV of the 2nd c.m. the starting of the following steamboats, in order of precedence:

Col di Lana, Foscarini, Castelverde, Gritti, Maria, Capo Vita, Aquitania, Norge, Fenicia.

I confirm the request; but since in the meantime I have had news that is preparing a new steamboat - the *Venier* - on which it takes aboard the V tank battalion M 13/40, that it is well reaches here very soon, I have inserted in the above list of the steamboats of which also the *Venier* laying it between the *Gritti* and *Maria*. As I have communicated with the cited telegram over no difficulty opposes to the contemporary reception also of all the steamboats requested.

It is necessary therefore only that the Ministry of Navy makes them depart very soon.

I have not comprised in the successive order the steamboats transporting only personal (which the *Esperia* and the *Marco Polo*) since, demanding their drainage in little time, the start can happen anytime and without particular authorizations.

I do not point out not even to the three steamboats (*Sabaudia*, *Tripovich*, *Scaroni*) transporting the material and the machines for the construction of the famous aqueduct since I still think the first two already in route for Libya and the *Scaroni* under cargo at Naples.

In any case I have this very day marked telegraphically to the G.S.R.A. the order of starting for all the steamboats not yet departed.

In the care of the material that does not turn out yet boarded I ask that the following cargo order of precedence is as follows:

- heavy trucks (102) of the 143rd truck company;
- odd lot trucks everywhere of the 112th truck company;
- motor tanker for water with trailers (35);
- fuel tankers (15);
- machine-shop trucks (6);
- tractors L 37 (79) and tractors (Caterpillar);
- bus (20) and ambulances;
- hearse (60);
- motor vehicles for the XII road movement battalion;
- trailers.

The Supreme Commander FF. AA. N.A.
Marshal of Italy
 GRAZIANI

P.S. Causes of delay in the inflow of the steamboats to the Libyan ports is also the not infrequent suspensions of the marine traffic arranged for reasons of safety from the Ministry of Navy.

MARSHAL OF ITALY
RODOLFO GRAZIANI

4 December 1940-XIX

To His Excellency the Marshal of Italy

Pietro Badoglio

CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

ROME

In relation to the sheet 4156 Op. of 24 November Thank You, Excellency, of the personal interest place to the issue of the shipment of motor vehicles. With sheet 3300 V of the 3rd current, this Command answers in detail in merit. The shipment of the steamships from Naples depends here on a complex of causes that unfortunately are tied to elements of act of God not always imputable to neglect of anyone.

It is the problem for same that introduces difficulty of every kind. The permanence of General GIORDANO in Italy has availed to resolve an amount of contrary reasons and a quick starter of the ships already loaded, and the Naval S. Command which it is ready to receive all those that will arrive.

First will be given by the way of Naples.

In all the complex the organization proceeds with the maximum effort allowed from the availability of means and the great distances for carry them with foot of work, for the completion of the road and the aqueduct for Sidi Barrani. The troops are at this point all tied up between Bardia and Barrani. The depots in course of completion. To vivify all the organization does not lack that these motor vehicles in arrival.

My fundamental criterion remains always that one not to give the way if not when all is predisposed, prepared and organized. They are sure to find in this Your full consent.

GRAZIANI

ROYAL EMBASSY OF ITALY
Berlin
OFFICE OF THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ

Berlin, 3 September 1940

Excellency,

I exactly refer to the letter of V. E. dated 21 August.

I have shown today the issue to the Commander of the Armed Forces.

In absence of the Marshal Keitel, I have spoken with the Gen. Jodl, his substitute, introducing your demands in their character of necessity and urgency. Gen. Jodl I felt persuaded and assured that the issue will now be taken in examination.

The answer would have given to me in a few days. Subsequently Gen. Jodl has told me that he wished express his thought of the merit to the military function of the Mediterranean.

His considerations - he has held to notice - have a value personal and off board, but they could be considered and to eventually give place to an exchange of ideas in via official.

Gen. Jodl - and this confirmation the already famous elements - consider the hypothesis that the German operations against England can *not* be conduct to termination before the next autumn.

In this case it would convene to use the winter - season of limited rendering for the operations against the British Islands, in order to *liquidate the situation in the Mediterranean*, that is to occupy Egypt and Palestine, to destroy or drive out the English naval forces from the Mediterranean, to occupy Gibraltar. The elimination of the English fleet of Alexandria (which could, according to Jodl, to try to escape for the Red Sea) would have political and military consequences of first order. Between the advantages it would be the possession of the communications in the Mediterranean with obvious profits reflected in the cares of French the Africa North and the supplying of Spain, that it could therefore be induced to take part.

Freed the Mediterranean, the Italian naval forces could act in the Atlantic, with those Germans, above all in order to prevent to the supplying of England, facing also the English naval forces. Gen. Jodl calculates that the Italian naval forces added with those Germans would be in good relationship regarding those English.

For the operations in Egypt the Germany could allow with own land forces beyond that with the shipment of materials. Gen. Jodl

he thinks, by the way of example, that they could be sent, also to short expiration (ready in the Italian ports of boarding within six weeks from the decision) one or two Armored divisions. These would carry the contribution of their experience and, operating outside of the summer, they would not be hindered from the strong heats.

Naturally - he adds Jodl is issue that it goes weighed from who has the decision of the operations, also in relationship to the transports and the supplying.

It has pointed out finally to the hypothesis that the German units can carry their assistance in according to time, after that the Italian forces have completed a first leap in Egypt.

I assured Gen. Jodl that I reported, but I insisted that the assistance required to be provided regardless of place and time problem as soon as possible. Gen. Jodl agreed on this need, but noted that the established assistance of German units, also the problem of sending materials concerned would be facilitated.

On the forgoing I observe:

1) The proposals of Gen. Jodl have a political aspect first of all, which it gives occasion to obvious considerations in varied sense, on which I think superfluous stop them. And to put in relief that the proposals refer to the hypothesis that success in Egypt is not taken place to short expiration our resoluteness. It can also be observed that the German General Staff recognizes all the importance of the Mediterranean theater, but you would see with favor also a direct participation of the Germany in the Mediterranean.

However, if the German assistance was received, it could be considered as an exchange of our assistance with aviation and submarines, in equivalent limits and holding the German units well in hand.

2) The logistic necessities of the Germanic units must carefully be weighed. Draft of units heavy, equipped of abundant means, accustomed to wide consumptions and living largely on the local resources.

Where this assistance was refused, the logistic considerations would be adapted to justify the refusal.

3) To agree to hold distinguished the two issues of the cession of materials and the assistance of a German Major unit, emphasizing the urgency of first.

To these lines he landed to me also in the future contacts,

4) The problem of the assistance of German forces for the operations in Egypt would have been examined also in the care of assistance of German aviation during the winter season.

You would ask V. E. of wanting to know:

1) which answer can be made in merit to the ideas of the Gen. Jodl. I would propose to answer for now that it will come taken in examination, but that while he urges the receipt of the material demands;

2) which materials in addition to the 5,000 trucks and the tankers indicated from V.E. are indispensable among those comprised in the note transmitted from the Joint Chief of Staff with sheet 875.A of the 17th c.m..

I ask to you, Excellency, to receive my submitting very respectfully.

Gen. E. MARRAS

COMANDO SUPREMO
THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF, GENERAL
Rome, 31 October 1940-XIX

Dear Marras,

I have received Your letter in dated the 26th. I answer to you directly - since the scope of this meeting are not other than to specify the situation well.

Premised that the choice of Innsbruk was made by Keitel. To me it is perfectly indifferent. Yesterday Rintelen said that only Keitel with You would have come, and to me with Rintelen. Inform me if that is accurate - that, if Jodl also came, I carry with me another -.

And now that to the Egypt issue.

We have in Libya 230 thousand men. Of the army one part must be towards Tunisia - given to the very uncertain situation of North-Africa - and part in the south - where we are in contact with French equatorial Africa, that is in dissidence and to the orders of De Gaulle. The calculation that 80 thousand men will be engaged in these two missions.

There remains 150 thousand for the east. Given the enormous distances, the services assume gigantic proportions and therefore it is obvious that of the 150 thousand now some of them will be and not 120 thousand true combatants.

The English currently have 250 thousand men in Egypt, and others are in course transports from India, South-Africa, Australia. And to acknowledge that to the end of the year they will be on the 300 thousand; that is the double quantity of us.

At such date the disproportion of the aid of the German armored division is almost null. It does not alter the relationship of the forces.

English have an entrenched field at Marsa Matruk of which we possess photographic surveys. But it is not at the Marsa that they mean to make the main resistance. And at the margins of the Delta that they prepare the lines for a long time defensive.

We therefore, in order to proceed beyond Marsa Matruk and to attack these defensive lines - covering that is 500 km. in the desert - must at least have a force a little superior to that of the English, that is by numbers that is for power of the artilleries. It would be necessary therefore to send to Cyrenaica another 200 thousand men with powerful guns and abundant ammunitions.

Now two things are certain:

1) That we have neither the ships to transport them - So more with the action taking place in Greece-nor the ports to land them, nor the

light ship for the escort of these convoys that would add at least 200 steamships;

2) That given also that managing to transport them, nobody would be in a position to make an advance and to maintain through 500 Km. of desert a similar armed mass.

Conclusion. The enterprise against Egypt is not possible less than such subversions of the situation that obligate English to transport their forces elsewhere.

What things can be done?

To go until to Marsa Matruk.

The desert therefore would be divided in two: 250 km. for English and as many as for us. Arriving at Marsa Matruk and well deployed against possible English counterattack, we will be in line of air to 250 km. from the port of Alexandria of Egypt. If at such moment we will be able to decide of the good aviation in dive and of a mass fighters for escort, we will be able to render the life to the English fleet in the port of Alexandria impossible, that is in the port where he has his basins and his means of life.

Here the German aid would be useful, in much aviation, *Stukas* and fighters, at least equal to that we sent to the north.

This, and not other, is the program that we have. That if the Germans have not felt themselves in a position to exceeding 40 Km. of sea in order to invade England, they will not be able to expect that to a fleet much stronger than ours as we transport 200 thousand men the 800 miles from Italy - and that then we make to traverse 500 km. of desert for one single caravan track in order to go to for the English neck.

Everyone easy sees how much must make the friend, difficult how much must he do the same.

Here because I have sped up this encounter: in order to put the points on. Of the armored division well just what is not known farce.

The aviation is necessary to me, with the most large bombs for the port of Alexandria, and not other.

That if then the Germans do not see other solution of the war that the action in the Mediterranean, I see it instead not with the air hammering of England but with the invasion of the island.

Circa Greece it was perhaps better to avoid, dates ours most insufficient availabilities and given the no aid in materials that up to now the ally have given to us, but in the situation that has been determined the operation is appeared unbreakable.

So I think I have made you very familiar. I salute You and good bye from Innsbruk.

REPORT OF TALKS HELD AT INNSBRUCK
ON THE DAYS OF 15 and 14 NOVEMBER 1940
between Marshal Keitel and Marshal Badoglio
(extract)

Meeting of the day of the 14th

Marshal Keitel outlines, first, the situation of Germany at the current moment of the war.

Circa the war in Africa Mar. Keitel holds to declare that he will outline the ideas that the German command has made itself so far. General von Thoma has been on the place and also with the approval of the Duce he has been convene that without the German aid it is possible that to the first of December prosecution of the attack for a successive leap ahead, with safety of success.

The English will not ever accept a great battle in the desert.

(Mar. Badoglio makes to observe as the English have understood that it does not convene they to fight with the desert to the rear; they will wait for the Italians at the Nile).

Reaching Marsa Matruh it will be possible to not only carry the offense on to Alexandria of Egypt with *Stuka* but also with aerial mine laying. And such mines, of new type, could be placed also in the Suez Canal. We believe, therefore, profit a assistance of the *Stuka*.

(Mar. Badoglio declares of being perfectly in agreement. He makes to observe as a pause at Marsa Matruh in order to make as much is unavoidable is now making at Sidi Barrani: the road and the duct of the water, for a length of 100 km.. Already to cause that we must bring, not being able to have use of that one on the place).

For the third phase of the campaign in Egypt it will be necessary to assume an immense front against the English forces that more and more will be increased. According to the German command the shipment of tanks to North Africa does not have the goal now. (Mar. Badoglio declares that he is in a position to reach Marsa Matruh without need of German assistance and adds that he has held that General von Thoma went on site. Who has not seen the desert cannot imagine. To fight in the desert is terrible. The logistic organization has such importance that, if it is not perfect, the battle is surely lost).

Mar. Keitel requests to introduce to the Italian Command his ideas to continue the operations until to Alexandria and that for having an exact general picture the situation strategic and to adequately to get ready.

(Mar. Badoglio answers that in the next meeting it will make a precise exposure).

The Marshal Keitel passes, therefore, to speak about Spain. Now the war in the eastern Mediterranean has become more difficult while it has become easier that one in the western Mediterranean. If Spain decided itself to come on to field in favor of the Axis, the war could ready be won. The Spanish fear that by, entering into the war, they will get fewer supplies, which come in great part from the America.

Already the German Command has made to make recognitions in the cares of an eventual action against Gibraltar and he has convinced himself that this is possible. They are themselves already preparing the troops. All that with the permission of Franco, but much prudent mind in order to prevent those others can precede. It must avoid, that is, than the English put themselves in Spain and Morocco.

(Mar. Badoglio makes to observe that also of Canaries it is necessary to occupy them, since the English gain a foothold even if they neglected Spain here).

The Germans will send heavy artilleries to Spain in order protect the coast. Then he will be occupy Gibraltar the western door of the Mediterranean for the English will be closed. This action prepares the Germans, also since Italy is engaged in the eastern Mediterranean; draft of one small action that demands an infantry regiment after all.

(Mar. Badoglio outlines his ideas in the cares of the action on Gibraltar, independently from who must effect it. What he needs is to win. For him the issue is connected with that one of North Africa).

Mar. Keitel observes that also the Portugal can offer points of support to the English.

Mar. Badoglio declares that the Portugal is an English colony.

Mar. Keitel says that not there would be reason for the Germans to enter in Portugal; it is but possible that English enter there.

Mar. Badoglio observes that they have already one base at fove del Tago. If Portugal remains firm, much better. It will not be attacked

* * *

Meeting day of the 15th (morning)

In the meeting of the morning of 15 November (from 09:00 hours to 12:00 hours) it takes to the floor Marshal BADOGLIO (...)

North Africa

At the explosion of the war was not completed supplying of N. Africa but, in spite of the English fleet, 76 steamboats are managed to reach the Tripolitania and the Cyrenaica. Only an empty steamboat has been torpedoed. Currently we have 230,000 men total the colony: a part (50,000-60,000 ,men) on the front to Tunisia and towards

the South in order to hold in check the movement of De Gaulle; the rest (80,000 men) deployed on the east front. Given to the length of the communication lines this figure he is remarkable. Between our Cyrenaica border and the Delta of the Nile there are 500 km. of the most desolated Desert. English have held only motorized forces to our frontier, conserving the rest behind. The advance until to Sidi Barrani has happened with a single track that came plowed quite from the passage of the motor vehicles. We are obliged now to make the road and to carry the water until to Sidi Barrani. It must remember also that in the desert the consumption of materials is enormous. The motors of the airplane and the motor vehicles, because of the sand, will give half. English are with the mass of their forces to the Delta of the Nile. According to the last news, the English forces in Egypt emerge to 250,000 men that they will probably become 300,000 before the end of the year since many units flow from the South Africa, from India and also from Australia. Therefore being the things, we can go until Marsa Matruh. Thanking Mar. Keitel lively but for this operation I do not have need of the German armored division. At Marsa Matruh the English has been constructed an entrenched field. We will attack it and we will conquer it. Then we will have as well as desert to the rear as much as have the English. Arriving at Marsa Matruh I mean to arrange ourselves well, since cannot be made a step behind. From Marsa Matruh to Alexandria there are 250 Km. With bomber aircraft, escorted by fighters, I can bomb by day the port of Alexandria.

Mar. Keitel remembers that it is possible with appropriate airplane to place also mines at Alexandria and in the Suez Canal.

Mar. Badoglio asserts that, arraigned Marsa Matruh, for assistance will ask for *Stukas*. This is the aid that can usefully given by the German to me.

Mar. Keitel agrees.

Mar. Badoglio continuous asserting that speaking to a too much expert marshal of war he finds useless to stop to demonstrate that with 150,000 men he cannot attack 300,000; having to the rear his last supplies and the desert.

Mar. Keitel is every thing clear.

Mar. Badoglio adds that even if he wanted to carry greater forces for employment against Egypt could not make living lacking the means them of transport necessary in order to reach through the desert until the Delta of the Nile.

Mar. Keitel is of the same warning. But - Mar. Badoglio continues - I do not want to never close the doors to fortune. If some new fact were taken place, like an internal upheaval in Egypt or other, and an audacity action however was justified, the performance. But this is a probability on which some calculation cannot be made.

Mar. Keitel asks when Mar. Badoglio believes naturally that the new a thrust can be made and that in order not to speed up.

Mar. Badoglio answers putting that Mar. Graziani is his student, that it has been 5 years in his command in Libya and then in the war in I.E.A., so that he has learned to prepare all meticulously. Therefore wants not prompt neither perturbed. As soon as he will have the news that the thrust ahead can be made, he will communicate it. He believes, but, that this is possible in December.

Mar. Keitel takes action with satisfaction of this declaration.

Mar. Badoglio passes dealing of the situation to the western frontier of Libya. Here explanation with France is reestablish to us to how much already said to Mar. Keitel circa the absolute necessity of one. If he will not be always in suspicion for N. Africa, now the presence of Generals like Noguès and Weygand, of which it is not sure and the government of Vichy is not sure not even that has named governors of the Admirals. It is absolutely necessary therefore that the two heads of government resolve the issue of the relationships with France. And he still more clearly explains his thought.

It is disposed to grant for Algeria and Morocco all the forces that were demanded but would not then want to find against if the pacts they were not concluded between the two governments. Therefore Keitel recommends to the Mar. if he can speak to the Führer since is resolved the issue with France, in which he does not see clear. He will give orders to General Pintor to lighten the most possible clauses of the armistice for N. Africa, but within if he has the suspicion. Here he wants to say the things just therefore as he thinks it: otherwise it is not possible to send. Part of the troops to our western Libyan frontier is in the Fezzan against De Gaulle.

Mar. Keitel says of being of that much satisfying.

Mar. Badoglio continuous asserting that in the Muslims' countries does not have to ever begin with a chessman even if small. He knows the governed was having Muslims for 5 years well; if the situation is gotten rid with France, any concession to them can be made for the remaining colonial empire.

Mar. Badoglio asks Mar. Keitel if it is satisfied on the argument and if it has some question for him to address.

Mar. Keitel asks a clarification circa the French forces in N. Africa. Since according to the data in our possession such forces would amount in total to 12 divisions, Marshal Keitel affirms that according to his data the divisions would be ten.

Mar. Badoglio reserved to make oneself to verify, for how much thinks that difficult.

Mar. Keitel expresses desire, if possible of having with regard for precise data and Mar. Badoglio promised to give them possession.

Mar. Keitel is declared completely of agreement and assures that they will be demanded of the French guarantees and sure measures in order to avoid complications.

Mar. Badoglio still on the argument calls the attention on the fact that the French in the Africa North have not had the feeling of the defeat of the country and in the bottom are for De Gaulle. There is also another factor. A general, named governor, having behind a Muslim mass cannot subside and must therefore make to flash with lightning to it the hope of a resumption and to create the favorable atmosphere to a rebellion.

Mar. Keitel finds this right.

Mar. Madoglio noted still another fact. General Weygand in a speech has made signal as much as had happened in France.

That has produced endured a such impression that it has had to change line, otherwise would have lost every authority.

Mar. Keitel declares satisfied and asserts that we may to ask Vichy that engagements and gives solid guarantees.

Mar. Badoglio concludes saying that draft to them of problem of vital interest. He go on dealing with Spain. He is convinced even that the blow on Gibraltar will be a most serious blow for the English prestige. If Germans do not make, they do not make the Spanish sure.

Mar. Keitel says that these alone could not do it. More the preparation developing them in France is put into effect with all conference.

Mar. Badoglio asserts that if English lose Gibraltar and do not go to the Baleari. It must therefore think next to the Canaries for being able to be in measure to make a front to an eventual English occupation. Spain has sent reinforces to the Canaries.

Mar. Keitel confirmation that Franco has assured to the Fuhrer.

Mar. Badoglio answers that he would be calmer if two German eyes went to see. As far as the occupation of the Portugal it thinks little probable since the English to it would be to seize land there.

Mar. Keitel remembers that, as has said, in the previous meeting, all it is ready in order to act rapidly in Portugal, but the action will have first place if will be the English threat.

Mar. Badoglio believes that, but this eventuality, not to bring the pain to occupy Portugal.

COMMANDER 10TH ARMY
OPERATIONS SECTION

N. 01/10266 with prot.

C.T. on 5 December 1940

Object: Alignment of the forces.

*To The Armed forces high command Armed Forces N.A.
Tactical command*

I transmit as much as proposes Commander XXI army corps in relation to the order with that Command n. 01/2806 of 27 Last November approximately the constitution of a new strong point between group "Maletti" and Division "Cirene":

- correct the considerations of action and reaction of the enemy;
- correct the appraisal of the land;
- the height of Bir Enba is sure less subject of the 192: stings but alive in the enemy alignment;
- in the formulation of the action, while opportunely it is useful for the occupation of the "Cirene", it also neglects that valid and perhaps most effective one of the Group "Maletti". These two strong points could not only confine themselves to hold ready convoys, but to move themselves temporary in within of some kilometer so as to diminish the interval to be in better condition in order protect the arrangement of the new strong point;
- the demanded forces me seem abundant of infantry and a little insufficient of tank destroyer equipment. In first time especially many means of fire will be necessary;
- I think, therefore as is sketched the action, the possible success.

But I observe:

- given of the movement of the enemy mechanized forces on the high in the noted alignment Bir Enba - Bir Mella - Bir Abu Gureimisc - Bir Kenays (and that is on our natural line of advance) the action towards Bir Enba gives the alarm to all the system and can give the interpreted as beginning of advancing with consequent possible intention of pin it decidedly;

- occupying the new strong point the prevailing is a problem for the supplying that they will have at least at first to develop near the Grouping " Maletti " or the " Cirene " Division will be (exposed);

- the current situation, especially if improved with occupation of some more advanced point. It seems to me such to guarantee the infiltrations, than of day they are seen and of night they must cover several tens of kilometers in difficult and complicated land.

Therefore being the things it is to ask himself if it convene to execute now the occupation in word that demands time (especially for the arrangement) and all the means available (does not have available the 105 demanded) in order to obtain an able transitory temporary deployment but to induce the enemy more and more to strengthen a direction that interests us, while the scope of the safety can be obtained improving the current situation.

I recognize, for against, that the proposed operation it has the advantage to acclimatize in the climate of war a new Division of the line and that the pointed out reaction can enter in the over view of the general plan.

And to my warning especially the time issue. If it must be remained very in the general situation, during the occupation it can be useful because knits our alignment. If it must be a transitory situation, it could convene abdicate there, for now, in order to act as a support at opportune moment.

Vice Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.
Gen. Italo GARIBOLDI

ARTICULATION AND LOCATION OF THE 10th ARMY
ON THE FIRST OF DECEMBER 1940

10th ARMY commander: Gen. Italo GARIBOLDI (had definitively replaced Gen. Mario Berti).

a) *I Area*: Sidi el Barrani (Gen. Sebastiano GALLINA).

COMMANDER LIBYAN DIVISIONS GROUP.

1st LIBYAN DIVISION (Gen. Giovanni CERUM). at the Wadi el Maktila, with a battalion at Sanyet Abu Gabeira:

- 1st and 2nd Libyan infantry Regiments with three bns. each, one company of 47/32 guns.
- 1st Libyan artillery Regiment with two 77/28 groups.
- II mixed-engineer battalion.
- a group of 75/27 from the 28 *October* (reinforced).
- two batteries of 65/17 (reinforced).
- a battery of 105/28 (reinforced).
- a company guns of 47/32 (reinforced).

2nd LIBYAN DIVISION (Gen. Armando PESCATORI). divided between the strong points of Ras el Dai and the Alam el Tummar:

- 3rd and 4th Libyan infantry Regiments with three BNs. each,
- one Libyan battalion (reinforced).
- one company guns of 47/32.
- 2nd Libyan artillery Regiments with two groups of 77/28.
- I mixed-engineer battalion
- IX L tank battalion (reinforced).
- a group of 75/27 of 28 *October* (reinforced).
- a group of 105/28 (reinforced).
- two batteries of 65/17 (reinforced)
- a company guns of 47/32 (reinforced).

4th DIVISION CC.NN. 3 *Gennaio* (Gen. Fabio MERZARI) at Sidi el Barrani (1);
228th and 250th CC.NN. legion, each with three Bns. a bty. of 65/17, one co. mortars of 81

(1) In the days 2, 3 and 4 December the 3 *Gennaio* CC.NN. division had replaced the 23 *Marzo* CC.NN. division at Sidi el Barrani retaining part of the artilleries (6 pieces of 47. 3 machine-guns of 20 millimeter. and 3 anti tank rifles).

- a machine-gun battalion,
- a company guns of 47/32
- a artillery regiment with two groups of 75/27 and a group of 100/17,
- a mixed-engineer battalion,
- a group of artillery of 105/28 (reinforced),
- a group of artillery of 75 C.K. A/A. (in rest).

b) *II Area*: Bug Bug (Gen. Carlo SPATOCCO).

COMMANDER XXI ARMY CORPS.

- XX L tank battalion,
- XLIII L tank battalion,
- X gr. squadrons machine-gunners,
- one company motorcyclists.

LIBYAN "MALETTI" GROUPING (Gen. Pietro MALETTI) at Alam el Nibeua and Alam el Iktufa: (1),

- I, V, XVII and XIX Libyan battalion,
- I Saharan battalion,
- II M tank battalion,
- one artillery battalion with 3 Bns. of 65/17,
- a group from 75/27, two companies guns of 47/32,
- one company mortars of 81,
- a bty. art. of 105/28.

63rd *Cirene* DIVISION (Gen. Alessandro DE GUIDI), in the area of Alam el Rabia - Bir Bofafi:

- 157th and 158th infantry regiment, each with three Bns., one cp. mortars of 81, a bty. of 65/17,
- 63rd company guns of 47/32,
- LXIII machine-gun battalion,
- 45th artillery regiment with 2 groups of 75/27 and 1 of 100/17,
- LXIII mixed-engineer battalion,
- I/21st artillery battalion of 105/28 (reinforced),
- III/12th artillery battalion of 100/17 (reinforced),
- III/21st artillery battalion from 75/27 (reinforced),
- two batteries of 65/17 (reinforced),
- 202nd company guns of 47/32 (reinforced).

(1) At the end of November the "Maletti" grouping - already employed by the Commander of the Libyan divisions group - passed to the orders of Commander XXI Corps in the night on 9 December returned to the orders of Gen. Gallina

64th *Catanzaro* DIVISION (Gen. Giuseppe AMICO), in the area of Alam Samalus (south-east of Bug Bug): (1)

141st and 142nd infantry regiment, each with three Bns., one cp. mortars of 81, one bty. of 65/17,

LIV machine-gun battalion,
64th company guns of 47/32,
203rd artillery regiment with two groups of 75/27 and one of 100/17,
LXIV mixed-engineer battalion.

c) *III Area*: Sollum (Gen. Annibale BERGONZOLI).

COMMANDER XXIII ARMY CORPS.

1st DIVISION CC. NN. 23 *Marzo* (Lt. Gen. Francisco ANTONELLI) at Bardia:

219th and 233rd CC. NN. legion, each with three Bns., one cp. mortars of 81, one bty. of 65/17,

a machine-gun battalion,
one 47/32 guns company,
202nd regiment artillery with 2 groups of 75/27 and one of 100/17
XLI L tank battalion (reinforcement),
a engineer battalion.

2nd CC. NN. 28 *Ottobre* DIVISION (Lt. Gen. Francisco ARGENTINE) in the area of Sollum-Halfaya(2):

231st and 238th CC.NN. legion each with three Bns., mortars coy. of 81, a bty. of 65/17,

- (1) the *Catanzaro* division had been located in the area of Bug-Bug, to the first of December, coming from Gambut-Bardia.
- (2) the 28 *Ottobre* CC.NN. division, scattered since first of October for street work from Sidi el Barrani to Berta, was collected on the first of December at Sollum.

To depart from the 5th they began to flow to Sollum the units from Tobruk and the engineer battalion, then those from Sidi el Barrani.

To the morning of the 8th they joined: the Commander of the 238th CC.NN.legion, the 138th CC.NN. Bn.; two coy. reduced of the 140th CC.NN. Bn.; the Command of the 231st legion; the 131st and 132nd CC.NN. bns.; the 202nd engineer bn. (less the handicraftsmen cp.); the divisional 202nd mtr. Bn ; the III group of 100/17; the 135th and 45th motorized Bn. from Sidi el Barrani will reach Sollum the 9th; the machine-gunnery coy. (less a platoon attacked by medium armor to east of Bug-Bug) will be withheld at Bug-Bug in order to reinforce, in place, a improvised defended.

The two groups of 75/27 will not return to the division not even detached after the advance on Sidi el Barrani by the Libyan divisions neither was the CC.NN. battalion under the command of the *Sirte* division.

one coy. mortars of 47/82,
a engineer battalion.

62nd Marmarica DIVISION (Gen. Ruggero Tracchia), in the area of Sidi Omar - Gabr du Fares:
115th and 116th infantry regiments each with three Bns., one coy. mortars of 81, a bty. of
65/17,
LXII machine-gun battalion,
62nd 47/32 guns company,
44th regiment artillery with 2 groups of 75/27 and 1 of 100/17,
LXII mixed-engineer battalion,
two 47/32 guns company (reinforcement})
two batteries of 65/17 (reinforcement),
LXII L tank battalion (reinforcement).

d } *Garrisons of Cyrenaica.*

FORCES OF THE "FORTRESS" OF TOBRUK:

g.a.f. { infantry }: 2300 men,
two mixed units of the engineers,
two groupings artillery g.a.f.,
XXI Libyan coastal battalion,
R. N. San Giorgio",
two groups of 20 millimeter,
10 batteries of the Navy.

FORCES OF THE "FORTRESS" OF BARDIA:

g.a.f. { infantry }: 2500 men,
a MG. squadron from position,
three companies guns from 47/32,
a grouping artillery g.a.f. { 17 batteries },
V group from coastal position and c.a.. XVII group from 75/27,
two batteries from 75/27.

GIARABUB GARRISON:

one Libyan motorized machinegun company,
one rifle company,
four Libyan companies MG. from position
two pieces of 65/17,
four of 20 mm.
six 47/32 guns

GARRISON OF EL GARN UL GREIN:
elements of the g.a.f.

GARRISON OF BIR ESC SCEGGA:
elements of the g.a.f.

GARRISON OF BIR ESC SCEFERZEN:
the 4 elements of the 4th cc.nn. 3 January Division.

e) Libyan Sahara (sketch 10).

CUFRA AREA:
two Libyan MG companies from position,
one Saharan company,
one Saharan company from 20 mm.

GIALO AREA:
a machine-gun battalion,
a Libyan battalion complements,
one Saharan company,
one company of 47/32,
one battery of 20.

f) *Under the directed command of Comando Superiore N.A.*

XXII ARMY CORPS COMMAND (Gen. Enrico Pitassi MANNELLA).

61st SIRTE DIVISION (Gen. Vincenzo DELLA MURA), located on the Litoranea, to the height of Gambut:

69th and 70th infantry regiment, each with 3 Bns and 1 bty. of 65/17,
43rd regiment artillery on 2 groups from 75/27 and 1 of 100/17,
LXI mixed engineer battalion,
two battalions parachutists at Barce (reinforcement).

MANEUVER ARTILLERY COMMAND:
10th and 20th army corps artillery groups.

SPECIAL ARMORED BRIGADE (Gen. Valentino BABINI), assembled in the zone between Marsa Lucch and the coastal strip, which mass of formed maneuver gives:

- I M-11 tank battalion,
- III M-13 tank battalion,
- XXI L Tank battalion,
- LX L Tank battalion,
- a Bersaglieres motorcyclists battalion,
- a artillery battalion of 75/27,
- a artillery battalion of 100/17.

**CONVOY ARRIVED IN EGYPT VIA RED SEA
FROM THE MIDDLE OF AUGUST TO THE MIDDLE OF OCTOBER 1940**

Con voy Num ber	Numb er of steams hips	Date of Arriva l	Material Transported	English	anzac	Indian	South Africans	Total troops
1	18	22-28 August	do not have list	8,605	5,500	6,100	-	20,250
2	Circa 50	6-7 Septem ber	1500 trucks, 1000 motorcycles, 400 armored cars, circa 100 aircraft from India various war material from Great Britain and Australia	12,000	7,000	26,000	-	45,000
3	30 known by initials R.S.5	10-11 Septem ber	Circa to 450 antiaircraft and field guns, 56 armored cars, imprecise number of aircraft, tanks. tractors, material for aviation, 500 Tons of war various material and 4000 Tons of railway material	7,000	9,530	2,600	2,350	21,480
4	numbe r imprec ise	24 Septem ber	Huge imprecise quantitative number one of war material among which was antiaircraft guns and field machine-guns, tanks, railway material, aviation material, forage	2,600	-	-	1,110	3,700
5	21 some of which probab ly to Port Sudan	25-26 Septem ber	do not have list	5,000 (presume d)	-	5,000 (presum ed)	-	10,000 (presum ed)
6	7	4-9 Octobe r	do not have list	4,740	3,100	3,000	-	10,840
7	40 some of which probab ly to Port Sudan	11 Octobe r	100,000 Tons of ammunitions, varied war material provisions and (30 Austrian aircraft)	-	20,000 (presu med)	-	-	20,000 (presum ed)
			total	39,900	45,130	42,700	3,450	131,270

GOVERNOR GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 3 of prot. R.P.

17 Decembers 1940

Subject: Military situation.
To the Duce

ROME

I. After nine days of enemy offensive, the operations mark a time of rest, today from my 01/3460 Op.

But the pause, sure of short duration, cannot but be a prelude of the other actions understood to eliminate the fortresses of Bardia and Tobruk in order to proceed then to the integral conquest of the Cyrenaica.

II. Our general situation is the following:

a) *The Fort of Bardia*, occupied from rather numerous forces; the Marmarica divisions (nearly intact), 23 *Marzo* (reduced of approximately 1/4), The 28 *Ottobre* (little more than half), The *Cirene* (very tried and deprived of many tank destroyer weapons), The *Catanzaro* (in conditions still more precarious), besides the elements of the frontier guard.

The fortified town-walls, having a development of some thirty kilometers, is little robust especially in fact of obstacles and tank destroyer weapons. As noted with my daily 01/3458 Op. the town is blockaded by enemy ships that hammer continuously and they destroy the existing equipments.

From land the communications with Tobruk are also cut, for how much yet not definitely.

b) The town of Tobruk, a picture of the efficiency of it you can have from letter of the Commander of the army 01/10599 that I sent to You in copy, joined with the answer from me dated (01/3454 Op.) (*). In short: fortified town-walls little efficient, with total development of beyond 50 km., garrisoned very weakly ("Sirte" Division , plus elements of the G. a F. and some artillery groups).

* Letter Omitted.

III. The supply shortage of the fort of Bardia and the chance that the opponent has to focus the offense of his means land, sea and air, lead us to believe that, despite my determination to resist, even this fort, in a longer or shorter, is destined to be overwhelmed by a mass attack of armored vehicles, prepared and accompanied by intense air and naval action. In this situation it is questionable whether groped does not agree to raise the troops of Bardia of Tobruk, in order to give to this last places a greater robustness. If you were of this opinion, I would ask you to give me permission immediately before the interception of communications with Tobruk is final and unbreakable.

IV. With this, however, I have no illusions of stopping the enemy offensive in front of the fort of Tobruk; we only take time, precious elements, that could allow to flow means suitable to block further progress.

The fall Bardia is indeed expected that the opponent, repeating the same process-blockade of the port, interception of communications and combined attack by land, sea and air can break some long stretch of fortified wall and penetrate into the fort. Nor, at present it is expected that our meager remaining mobile forces, to combat enemy action in a manner which illusion be shattered.

The hard experience of these days most bitter to us being in fact to conclude that, in these theaters, a Armored division is more powerful than a entire Army.

In front of the armored troops firmer and aggressive not hold: the anti-tank weapons is not sufficient to halt the attack, especially if prepared by the action of massacring air raid.

Nor you can invoke a comparison operation for the capture of Sidi Barrani, because it was due to maneuver on the reverse of the enemy, which forced him to retreat to escape the threat.

V. For these reasons, as I have already indicated, I have prepared the organization to defend the ridge of Derna, on which are flowing all means still available in Cyrenaica in addition to the Division "Sabratha" call from Tripoli and that now it's first echelon is arriving.

This position, very strong on the front for the presence of a natural antitank ditch, may be circumvented for the strip of ground, easily traversed by a good track, that from Martuba that adduces to Berta.

Therefore, as it appears from the sketch attached to the south of this last resort will displace forces important and for this is located the Armoured Brigade (which really reduced to two tank companies

M 13, to two battalions of light tanks and two groups of artillery) have been deployed to the south of Derna.

VI. But it is far from inconceivable that the opponent, instead of facing a bone so hard, decides to ignore the forts of Derna- Berta and definitely points on Benghazi -Soluch -Agedabia for good tracks that adduce to Tmimi Mechili (map attached).

Today this operation might seem still far away and unlikely. But when the opponent had occupied Bardia and Tobruk making basis for his advance on Benghazi using the sea liberally, the difficulty of the operation would decrease considerably.

To prevent such eventualities I just reinforced the sector Agedabia -Gialo -Augila since the raid occurred on Augila, and now I have also worked in the crossroads for Marada forces on the coast road. Also, I did put some anti-tank weapon in Mechili, where there is an old small, and placed the tributaries units from Tripoli -with the exception of the "Sabratha" - collected meanwhile in Benghazi. It is, however, of small forces and all, except the new M. 13 tank battalion, not suitable to support the fight against mechanized means. In fact, almost all the anti-tank means available to the 5th army were passed to the 10th including those of the *Sabratha*.

VII. That being the case it seems perfectly useless to take other *men* from Tripoli. Is imposed, however, sending the *appropriate resources* to bear comparison with their British counterparts, namely:

- 1) medium tanks and armored cars to the extent appropriate to the task;
- 2) means of numerous anti-tank fire.

I know of one or the other have little availability in Motherland. I am told, however, that at the manufacturer there is a significant number of M 13 tanks not assembled in units for organic deficiency of trained personnel.

It would be very appropriate for that material was here started to be able to deploy the battalions of light tanks, transforming some if possible, or part of them, with medium tanks.

However, the stakes -the salvation of Libya-is that any effort to impose that focus that is needed.

The moment is serious and, no matter how bitter succeed, I think we should pass on to just boldness of other times, seeking the help of Germany.

If we could have one or two armored divisions, we would definitely make the enemy return to the ridge of Sollum.

If, however, you came into this thinking one thing above all is necessary: *timeliness*.

In the program of dispatching an Armored Brigade, under the authority von Thoma, it was planned for the influx at a improbable time. Should we put you on a different path, including breaking the traditional respect to the organic.

To me down here they are necessary armored cars, tanks, anti-tank weapons and vehicles. If they may flow organically grouped in armored divisions the better, provided that they arrive on time. Otherwise they come also in blocks and they are delivered up after the Divisions, down here, if we have time.

VIII. At the last moment the S.I.M. informs me that it would shortly be extended to the offensive to the Siwa zone: the only goal can be cut at the base of the bastion Cyrenaica isolating it from Tripolitania.

As you can see, my predictions are close to reality, however fantastic they may appear. Duce soon send armored vehicles and soldiers of Italy will save Libya.

The Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
General Staff

M.P.A. on all the MM.PP.AA.

Cirene, 18 Decembers 1940

secret message

Stamage

ROME

"N. 4 R.mo Pers. His Excellency Guzzoni. As you will go stating from my communications that represent the consequential events genuinely the more serious things go making every day. At this point is Bardia isolated from ground & from the shot at sea as well as from the sky. It will be able to resist then until the total sacrifice of the defenders but it is destined to be overrun afterwards. It will be subsequently the fate of Tobruk. The enemy more and more command of the sea on which he runs about liberty will go tightening the inexorable vice against it & will go around it by ground. As it turns out from today report sent to the Duce the it is not means fortified sufficiently of munitions & of troops nor granted to me to give them. I am in fact collecting all possible means on the Derna - Berta - El Mechili line where the last game to play. But the enemy has one formidable card in his hands. This consists in the possibility to go around all the *Gebel* for the roads Mechili - El Abiar & Mechili - Sceleidima that in any season is practicable from his medium armor & from armored car rubberized in special way for the desert. Through said roads tip directly on Benghazi that does not offer combinations adapted to a defense to the bitter end. If it will not be succeeded therefore to arrest the enemy on the Derna - Berta - El Mechili line the fate of the Cyrenaica it will be marked. For Tripolitania I have confirmed order that all mobile troops enter in the entrenched field of Tripoli maintaining in action only the western line of cover. I am drawing from those Divisions the last availabilities artilleries. It is necessary therefore that they are reintegrate from the Mother Country. This is the situation seen with the maximum coldness. We have made there our necessities present. We are making & we will make all how much as is here possible to make for oppose the enemy that give to all the news that reaches to us decidedly it is oriented at to reach the occupation of the Libya. In this moment one is more and more prevailed to have at disposition the most powerful aviation. I do not dramatize but I do not make harmful illusions. Only the shipment of powerful land & aerial means estimate to locking under of the enemy can still save the situation".

GRAZIANI

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

MPA/MPA 631-1770.21-1300

21 December 1940

Directed: *To The Camando Supremo*
Text: 01/3686 – for Duce.

From the successive day to the fall of Sidi Barrani in obedience to your directives is begun the total preparation for the ulterior development of the operations on Marsa Matruh. In effects the state of the communications of absolute water poverty of the occupied zone did not allow the immediate prosecution of the offensive. After the conquest of Sidi Barrani the construction by hand of the aqueduct and the road from Capuzzo to Sidi Barrani for approximately 120 km had to be put of immediate development. At the same time it was gone carrying out the collection of the troops and the assembly of means and logistic equipments in order to assume the offensive alignment. In order to save on means of transport some units preformed the transfers of hundred of km. on foot, all always gasping to the battle.

As it turns out wide from the postal censorship to first of December the organization was in great part completed exceeding difficulty of every kind. The aqueduct, imposing work constructed to time and technique of supremacy using all the existing pipes however in Libya since 3 December, carried to Sidi Barrani 4 liters of water a second that is equivalent to 335,000 liters to the day, while the road was constructed it taking advantage of all that was possible to draw from Libya was completed as below and in great part rolled. In the forward warehouses of fuel and ammunition provisions already the previewed equipments were nearly all concentrated, lacked only the completion the motor vehicles that as you know they were flowing from the motherland. In the meantime our aviation systematically carried out demolition work on the rears and on logistic systems & equally it made the enemy concentrating its offenses on our rear bases & especially on Benghazi. Our advance troops in order to test enemy resistance & to know the efficiency struck the land before our alignment employing themselves in combat within enemy mechanized means and stated in the action of these growing of aggressiveness and audacity culminated in the feet of arms of 19 November on the front of the Maletti grouping. While Major unit assumed the alignment previewed for the imminent advance on Marsa Matruh I supplied to make to garrison adequately with fire elements the line of departure from Halfaia at Rabia & Sidi Barrani in order to guarantee the columns marching from eventual enemy offenses on the southern flank. Since the first of October while aerial recognitions found a continuous accumulation of forces and of means in the region to east of Marsa Matruh accumulation that could be attributed to the intention of enemy in forces to ours previewed offensive thrust December 7 by a prisoner captured during an attempted

nighttime push against the “Cirene” division at Alam Rabia had news that an attack against us would have been delivered within one ten of days; for how much the news could seem tendentious however was not neglected that indeed immediately I gave them acquaintance to the army that in its turn put all the troops in alarm. In the day of 8th from several symptoms (increase of the aerial recognitions on our rears, repeated signaling of strong enemy mechanized nuclei between Bir Enba & Bir Mella) I had the feeling of the imminence of enemy attack & I renewed to the commands warning & the incitement to make ready to support in case it was pronounced. Also aviation was oriented to take part in mass. As you see it is not being any surprise. All we knew of the probable enemy attack, as it has pronounciation itself to the dawn of 9 December & like has swept up the divisions of the advanced alignment appears from how much follows. Against the strong point occupied from our troops in the desert, flat land, partially lacking in whichever tactical holds the enemy has had good game employing masses of medium armor, armored car & tanks medium, heavy & supported most mobile batteries and with most effective competition of the air forces. Generally the preparation of short duration came entrusted to the artillery and aviation & as soon as stopped the massacring aerial bombing the medium armor were burst from all the directions against our troops and therefore in spite of the most courageous resistance the strong points within a few hours were to one by one overrun.

The first one to be invested was the Maletti grouping that began an ordered withdraw as well as the second Libyan division that had sent one strong quick column to it in aid. Operating against the armored mass in fact from a wide front concentrically could have little effect the tank destroyer arms & the artilleries with our divisions forced to disperse the fire on numerous most mobile targets & aimed decidedly on the objective. With the crushing superiority of the armored vehicles employed in mass the essential reason of the rapid initial success brought back from the enemy must seek therefore. Our Libyan national divisions & have also in this ill-fated battle maintained the high traditions of value & of heroism of our army. The Commanders & troops have written in desolated extended of the western desert the pages of more radiant the heroism; episodes of epic greatness have been carried out in the learn fight between the bare chested soldiers of Italy and very fortified armor of the soldiers of the British Empire. Shreds of our encircled isolated divisions from every part has resisted until the last cartridge as well as tightened around the sacred symbol of the immortal motherland has had to withdraw from the very powerful enemy. Eliminated the troops of heroic General Maletti, roman fallen at the head of the Libyan battalions and those of the second Libyan division flung by the armored tide on Sidi el Barrani where the Camicie Nere division “3 Gennaio “ bombarded also from sea & from the air has offered a wall of chests resisting valiantly for two days. The first Libyan whom they give Maktala Wadi, was subordinate to intense bombardment of the English fleet had also been, it had tried to collect on Sidi Barrani found the road blocked by armored car & was hold the head long also knowing its marked fate. This situation that from moment to moment was gone already aggravating for the marked infiltrations on the road of Bug Bug threatened to sweep up also the divisions of second line “Catanzaro” & “Cirene “. If also it had been possible launch a counterattack against the armored car it would have been devoting them to certain destruction. For which profiting

by the resistance offered from the troops blocked in Sidi Barrani, decided to embezzle such divisions to enemy grip & bring them to the Halfaia – Sea – Sollum – Capuzzo line where in the meantime was having outlined a defense with the rear divisions.

The afternoon of the 10th I ordered therefore the regression. This was carried out regularly enough for the “Catanzaro” until the height of Tishdida, when, resumption of the march, it also became encircled, shot at from armored car & disordered. The heroic sacrifice of some units that will resist until the 12th, allowed two thirds party of the division to reach our lines of Sollum. The “Cirene” division instead escaped better from the enemy grip but it arrived very tired at Halfaia with the enemy on their heels. On the evening of the 12th while the residual defenders of Sidi el Barrani & of Maktila encircled for three days & incomplete opposed to the last heated resistances to the vanguards of the enemy armored columns were already closing about our troops of Halfaia trying to entwine the right flank. During days of the 13, 14 & 15 were fought tirelessly in the inside of the quadrilateral Halfaia – Sidi Omar – Capuzzo – Sollum where the imperturbable troops of General Bergonzoli counterattacking vigorously succeeded to eliminate threatening enemy infiltrations that they try to cut our alignment in two & detach them from the town of Bardia. On the evening of the 15th, while new mechanized columns lock under with concentric maneuver towards Sollum- Gabr bu Fares & Sidi Omar and a group appears already at Sidi Azeis, all the troops of General Bergonzoli refold in perfect order to the town of Bardia where they still hold head to the enemy attack with equal value to the decided will to resist until the last. For having a complete picture of the battle it is necessary to insert here the action of enemy fleet & of aviation; the first has held constantly under its powerful offense our columns operating along the coastal line attacking with particular violence against Sollum & Bardia. The second evidently reinforced from new units that it has continuously shot at our columns in march, the strong points occupied by our troops, the rears, our logistic bases & especially the airfields & the forts of Tobruk & Bardia.

For fatal atmospheric adversities, due to sand raisings on the forward fields and then flooding from exceptional rains, our aviation has not been able to make to feel all the its weight in the battle. However lavishing themselves as always beyond every limit, exceeding difficulty of every kind, it is jetty in the fight with inexhaustible ardor & audacity without equally, seeding death & the destruction on the enemy columns. Some statistical data will be enough to give you an idea of the contribution given by it to the battle in Marmarica: a) hours of flight: 900 from bombers and 1300 from fighters; b) explosive launched: 2 torpedo, 13,000; between bombs and fragments with a total of nearly 2,000 tons; c) rounds of machine-gun shot 17,000; d) enemy aircraft shot down sure 42 & probable 20. It is surely premature to make forecasts on the developments of this titanic fight in which the enemy has concentrated the best troops from four continents. However I can now end saying to you that if today, at 12 days from the beginning of the offensive, his armored divisions mark the Port Bardia pass that due east exclusively of the value of the soldiers of the land of Italy and of the air that also in evident and serious means inferiority, they have known to fiercely hold immolating head to the enemy without saving. Once again I confirm to you in categorical way

down here everyone has done their duty to the extent possible.

If the number of those who have had the misfortune to be captured is high this should not make you doubt their value: they held until the last with the will to stand up in agony & until the last moment before the enemy inexorably advancing well protected to secure the prey they have launched with the last spark from the radio to the cry of “Long live Italy”. Faced with these facts the ignoble baying unleashed by enemy propaganda is nothing but a pack of lies that only makes shame to those who dare to write & demonstrating therefore had lost that sense of dignity & respect to the value although unfortunate it is that was always characteristic of the people of high civilization.

Marshal of Italy
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

COMMANDER 10th ARMY
OPERATIONS SECTION

N. 01/10599 with prot.

C. T. on 16 Decembers 1940

Object: Necessities inherent to the new situation.

To The Comando Superiore Armed Forces North Africa.

Tactical commander

Directing me on the current situation and in consequence of the telegram of that Command 01/3420/Op. today, Opportune creed to make the point approximately the consistency of the defense of the fortress of Tobruk, after hearing the Commander of the same fortress.

I make abstraction of the fort of Bardia, that by now, strengthened from the mobile troops of General Bergonzoli, is in the best conditions possible in order to resist.

The situation in the town of Tobruk from the fortress side is noted. Essentially:

- the tank destroyer pit lacks for wide sections, whose work was suspended by superior order. It comes now replaced by minefields;
- whichever depth in the defensive organization lacks being, as it is noted, at the beginning of the hostilities still in planning the constitution of the large centers both advanced and those arrear.

From the garrison side, while it is possible with the G.a.F., with the troops of the "Sirte" Div. and . the CC.NN Bn of Libya to garnish the works, is hardly possible to constitute with the forces available the garrisons of the sector (of 2 bns. each) which but are deprived of artillery and tank destroyer arms, that they are necessarily destined to reinforce the works given the total sparsely of some arms.

Which reserves at the disposition of the Commander of the fort exists a single reinforced battalion of Inf. one bty. of 20 mm.. Given the amplitude of the perimeter of the town, the possibilities of participation and the effectiveness of this his reserves are of all the hazardous ones.

On the whole they are had, for a perimeter to defend 54 km., 22,000 men, par to approximately a man for 21/2 linear m., and 198 guns

(excluded 149 and 120 and including the machine-guns of 20 mm.), par to approximately 3 pieces per km.

It is in the field of the artilleries, above all, where the deficiency is felt because, dealing with to arrest the attack of the medium armor employed in mass, are with the tank destroyer arms and the guns of Hvy.Cal. that us it can be opposed to the impetuosity of the enemy.

In the fort of Tobruk, it is for the particularity of the land, is for wide existing gaps in the tank destroyer pit, is necessary to have one nearly uniform density along all the front.

Moreover, given to the forts lack of headquarters, an amplitude of the town, the rapidity with which the mechanized battle it is resolved, it is necessary that the two Sector headquarters and that one of the town have a strong motorized reserve.

In this situation it would be therefore necessary that they came assigned to the fort:

- n. 100 tank destroyer pieces from 47/32 and 20, are in order to complete the armament of the fortified town-walls, are in order to sketch the organization of a rear defensive system;
- n. 4 groups of 75/27 and two groups of 105/28, necessary to complete the alignment in the more deficit sections of the front (to esp. on the front of the Sahel Wadi where there are not artillery);
- a mechanized unit of the force of a rgt. of Inf. and adapted share of tank destroyer artillery of Hvy.Cal and antiaircraft;
- two co. from 47/32 and two bn. from 20 m/m motorized, at the disposition of the sector headquarters.

For how much Intendancy refers to the motor vehicles for the services of the town and the operation of the Delegation, the situation today was already communicated to stamane that the Comando Superiore (of the 150 trucks left by Col. Nicolardi there is approximately 50 unserviceable).

In order to assure such operation at least 80 efficient motor vehicles in part are necessary naturally those to assign in just to the motorized Inf. Rgt., and a 47 company and a batteries of 20.

In conclusion creed that, if it wants that the fort accomplish to the delivery of the Duce, is necessary to concentrate all necessary means, otherwise the resistance - to in spite of the will and the value of the men - could not be of long duration.

Evidently the land action will be integrated with the aerial action, and as much as can make aviation demonstrates the combats to it of these days. But, how much greater will be the number of the aircraft that the central authority will be able to put to disposition, much greater will be the probable resistance.

Finally, in the agreed case to constitute a mass of maneuver in order to operate to the with the exception of the towns, think that it would be necessary to be able to arrange at least 2 motorized divisions and completely rich in tank destroyer arms and that is possibly constituted with the previously pointed out formations, that is:

- for each bn. of Inf. one co. from 47 with 8 guns;
- for every rgt. of Inf. two bty. from 20 with 8 guns.

Over how much I represent that C.S. for as much as I will think possible to make in order to come encounter to the situation; also penetrating, naturally, of the difficulties that are opposed to the integral realization of the necessities with compromising.

Commanding General
M. Berti

GOVERNOR GENERAL Of LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

17 Decembers 1940

To his Excellency Berti

TOBRUK

01/3454/Op. 17 Decembers 12:00 hours. Thank You, Excellency, put therefore in evidence in yours 01/10599 of the 16th current well in the cares of the necessities for the defense of the fortress of Tobruk as much as it is exactly to by way of example you could already be calculated from the day in which said fortress he was constituted and that is, creed four or five years ago. But in the current moment recriminate for the deficiencies is the issue that can only serve at to put at place your personal responsibilities of the moment. Now that this have made it remains not but to you to hold present these conclusions:

- 1) The fortress of Tobruk must be maintained to the bitter end;
- 2) You do not have therefore but to employ for the better exploitation of availabilities current & making to work all in order to improve the defensive grid;
- 3) to keep in mind who this Armed forces high command will make as much as possible one for subsidize in base to availabilities & the necessity that is incumbent it to supply to the protection of all Libya;
- 4) to hold still present that gives the Mother Country is asked & it is sent all that that is possible for with of the difficulties that at you sure are not ignored.

Please receive.

GRAZIANI

COMMANDER 10th ARMY
OPERATIONS SECTION

N. 01/10623

18 December 1940

Object: Issues relative to the new situation.

*To His Excellency the Marshal of Italy Rodolfo Graziani
Supreme Commander Armed Forces North Africa.*

Tactical Commander

I have taken acquaintance of phonogram the 01/3454 Op.

I wish profoundly, Excellency, to clear that between the scopes of my the letter not there was that put to place my the personal responsibility and my hurts that the my words can have been in such sense interpreted.

The moment you want to live that self-interest to disappear in front of that of the Motherland!

The my understanding it was only that one to show a situation of the fortress of Tobruk that, if it could be noted for how much refers to the system of fortifications, for how much it has drawn, instead, to the personnel, the arms and the material, could also not be known in its details.

Naturally in representing such deficiencies not my intension of being able at once to obtain all demanded as much as since, as asserted in my conclusions, my notes are the difficulties that are opposed to you, but, rather, to show a compressive picture of orientation so that the Supreme Commander account to can hold measure that introduces means and troop availability.

In this particular moment, Excellency, I can assure that my alive desire is that one to cooperate to your action in all the methods and with all the possibility.

And therefore that allow me to express to you - even if the thought on the current situation is not demanded - even if this can exceed that of my the competence.

To my opinion such situation, for how much serious one, is not deprived of hope.

Certain signs of the behavior of the enemy, several intercepted messages, do not exclude that of not long duration - in the enemy offensive can be a pause is clear.

The question is how and where to organize during the pause our resistance and, consequently, what will be the use of scarce forces available, waiting for what will come in reinforcement from the motherland.

They are now taken part precise directives of the Duce: "to resist to the bitter end in the fortresses of Bardia and Tobruk".

I think that such directives answer in the better way to the current moment, because they are convinced that, until when these fortresses will remain in our hands, difficultly for the enemy - but harmful infiltrations, but not decisive - will be able to advance much in depth and force in the inside of Cyrenaica.

And therefore that the problem if, given the modest efficiency of the fortress of Tobruk is shown me - inasmuch as Bardia has a satisfactory defensive system - convene to concentrate all the forces and all the means available, instead that to space out the forces in depth in order to try to arrest the enemy on successive lines of defense, than in this territory they are in kind little suitable and easy out flanked.

I am decidedly for the first solution and I am therefore that I have shown the complete picture of the more urgent necessities of the fortress of Tobruk, with the understanding to begin to concentrate in the fortress, inasmuch as not there are the necessary forces and means, at least all those available ones.

Maintaining as the Duce wants the fortress, they - verify the determined eventuality - will be able in successfully to constitute line of departure for reconquest of the territory.

This is my thought that, which your more directed collaborating creed mine it must face.

I hold but to assure you in the more formal way that, any are your understandings, will strive with my possibilities for the coming encounter with full confidence in you, Excellency, and in the final success.

The Commanding General
M. Berti

GENERAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 1 of prot. Ris.mo Pers.

Z.d'O, on 10 January 1941-XIX

Subject: Military situation in Cyrenaica.
To *Their Ecc. the Chief of General Staff*

ROME

The prolonging of the pause of the operations in Marmarica if he has granted a sure breath to our *defensive* organization, however has not modified the general situation that conserve in the substance all the character of gravity which I have pointed out in my previous report.

It, in fact, introduces itself in the following terms:

1) *The town of Bardia*, garrisoned by 4 divisions with approximately 45,000 men and 430 pieces of varied bore from the 20 m/m to the 149/35. with fortified town-walls it has a perimeter of 32 km., of which approximately 20 protected by tank destroyer obstacles. The logistic situation today can made satisfactory, in as much as the provisions is sufficient for a month, with consistent ammunition equipments.

The supplying, but, becomes every day more difficult: our motor-sail boats which such service is entrusted, are spotting them from the coast (especially between Marsa Lucch and Ras Azzas) and subject to the offenses of the enemy light ship that navigate off the coast and that practically blockade the port of Bardia . In these last days a good 5 motor-sail boats have not arrived at destination.

From land the town completely is encircled.

Supplying via airplane - to it leave the smallness of the contribution - is not possible because the only field (Menastir) is outside of the town-walls.

In the inside of this there is a single landing field where aircraft from reconnaissance or fighting only can land. On the whole, town has sufficient forces in order to contrast an enemy attack, but it does not have possibility of actions maneuvered outside of the town-walls and therefore, to more or less long expiration, it is destined to fall was not other then by exhaustion.

2) *Fortress of Tobruk* is in considerably inferior conditions to those of Bardia. The perimeter is of 54 km. approximately, of which only one score is protected by tank destroyer obstacle (artificial and natural).

And Garrisoned only by 27.000 men with 300 guns of various caliber (from the 20 mm to the 149/35). The density of the occupation of the town-walls

is much weaker here. The small quick columns, than are successful launch outside in order to contrast the exploratory activity of enemy mechanized means, they cannot but to have most insufficient efficiency and limited range.

Moreover, they come to take away the means of fire to those much insufficient which the town has.

3) *Sector of Giarabub* - The situation is very notable, for having communicated again dated yesterday.

4) *Zone of deployment Derna-Berta-Mechili* - Function of the troops located in this zone is to arrest - with the maneuver of the mobile nuclei supported by zones of obstacle and fortified points - the eventual penetration towards the *Cyrenaican Gebel* and the plain of Benghazi.

The forces that have been able to collect are still very meager - including one division reinforced by some artillery groups and the armored brigade - and of limited efficiency for insufficient mobility employing from the few motor vehicles available.

The armored brigade hardly has truly efficient 25 M.13 tanks . I have had located at Mechili, with recon nuclei at Ain Gazala and Tmimi, essentially for placing them in conditions for contrasting eventual enemy infiltrations to the west of Tobruk. Naturally very little it could make against an attack by massed mechanized means. Neither I have been able press ahead in order to act in competition with the troops of Tobruk in order not relieve the only one half of maneuver in the zone of Mechili from which threaten directly Benghazi.

5) *Defensive Organization of the Cyrenaican Gebel and the outlets on the plain of Benghazi.*

I am giving run to the defensive organization of the Cyrenaican Gebel by means of the creation, in the points of obliged passage and life, of small fixed and mobile garrisons, charged to contain, to cage and to eventually destroy enemy mechanized means infiltrations.

This organization makes head to the " Commander Military Zone of Barce -, entrusted to the bravest most practical officer of the places and colonial wars, Colonel Piatti del Pozzo.

I have already pointed out also in the creation of the Benghazi covering sector, in charge of strong garrison of the outlets of the Gebel on the Benghazi plain : Wadi Bacur, Regina and Sceleidima.

Also this organization is already at a good point.

6) *The Defensive Organization of the southern Cyrenaica.*

In relation to the eventuality of operations coming from Siwa, the defense of Agedabia has been upgraded (by means of the allocation of a group from 75/27, besides two batteries of 100/17 that to already were located there) as well as of the outlets from Marada on the coast, to El Agheila and the west

The enemy alignment, which it turns out to this date today, is brought back on the- map here attached*.

It is particularly threatening the location of the 7th Armored division, that it could prelude to an eventual turning movement of the town of Tobruk. And worrisome also the lack of news on an element of that division, the 11th Hussars regiment (all armored car) that in the operations they carried out here, it has always constituted the tip of the enemy army. While yesterday it turned out in the Gambut area, in the night it has been replaced by the armored brigade (all of tanks) and it has been moved it is not known where.

In this situation, as one aimed in forces at the rear of Tobruk could not be contrasted by the meager exploring nucleus of Ain Gazala, has arranged the shipment of all the 10th Bersaglieres regiment and the V Tank battalion M-13, that they leave tonight from Benghazi.

I have had to made this decision - that it deprives to me of my only reserve - in order to prevent that the enemy cut the communications between Tobruk and Derna and above all falling on the airfields of Ain Gazala and Tmimi - where great part of the forces of the 5th Air Fleet is located - and that is the only airfields by now remained from which our airplane can leave for presents in the sky of Bardia.

From the foregoing it is evident that in the current situation, in spite of all the efforts, all the foresight, we are forced to passively endure the initiative of the enemy exclusively for the lack of a mighty mass of armored forces in order to counterattack.

If we today had such element we could act still counter offensively from the Tobruk-El Adem front towards Bardia and crush against the defense of this the enemy forces that besiege the fort. If this element of force will not reach in time, the enemy threat to overrun the towns of Bardia and Tobruk with 70,000 men and 700 guns. And the last hope of salvation of Libya will be entrusted to the few troops that will be struck between Derna-Berta and Mechili.

This cruel truth I feel the *need* to represent and to remind because the current pause does not induce to fall back in the false optimism that more symptoms to transpire to be arranging in the public opinion of the Motherland.

It is superfluous to add that the delivery for Bardia-Tobruk and all is that one not to yield until the end *and to the last*.

Marshal of Italy
The Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
Rodolfo Graziani

* Omitted.

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

N. 2 of prot. Ris. Pers.

6 January 1941

Map n. 2 (*) and 1 Chart attached.

Subject: Military situation after the fall of Bardia.

To the Duce

ROME

I follow up to my report 1 Ris.mo dated 10 January, directed to his Ecc. the Chief of General Staff, and telegram n. 01/156/0p. yesterday.

Fall of Bardia, in spite of heroic sacrifice of troops of General Bergonzoli, for as much previewed since 11 December, when that is the complete picture of the developments was outlined in my mind that could have had the enemy offensive, has given once again the measure of the impossibility to resist, with means and the arms of which we arrange, to steel the avalanche that the enemy opposes to us, supported and powerfully assisted by a aviation and a fleet having, in this theater, crushing superiority.

If Bardia, defended by 45,000 men with more than 400 guns, deployed on 30 km. of front, has been overwhelmed completely in the third day of attack, it is not from thinking that Tobruk can resist better and very long.

The 27,000 men and the 300 guns that garrison the 54 km. of the town-walls, cannot in fact that to repeat the heroic sacrifice of the defenders of Bardia.

Nor it is from thinking that the adversary pauses in his offensive push, that indeed from many symptoms the tendency is deduced to accelerate the rhythm of the operations in order to eliminate very soon the entry.

Since yesterday in fact, enemy aviation has extended its explorations to the area of Cirene and Mechili. From interceptions turns out already in the run towards the western alignment of all the 7th Armored Division, including the elements that have participated in the attack of Bardia.

*Omitted.

Today has begun the investment of the Fort from part of the enemy medium armor. After that various episodes of the new drama they are easy expectable.

Being therefore the things, the last game will have to be played, to expiration probably much next one, in the area comprised between Dema - Berta and Mechili.

Since you can estimate our operating possibilities in this eventuality that, by now, only a miracle or a powerful diversion on other fronts could avoid, Their precise force elements on which we can count and on their location.

As already said in my report 1 Ris.mo Pers. and as better it turns out from the maps attached here, the forces that to until today it has been possible to line up between Dema - Berta and Mechili, therein comprised the located elements at Ain Gazala and Tmimi, altogether amount to hardly 15.000 men with 250 pieces of artillery - from the 20 mm to the 105/28 - and 60 medium tanks.

With the elements arriving from the 5th Army (4 bns. machine-gunners, two groups of 75/27 and a dozen of batteries of 20, of 47/32 and 65/17) and always that they arrive time, we will be able to field 20,000 men, 350 guns and 60 medium tanks.

And all this, in how much is not possible to draw other forces from the 5th Army, already weakened to the maximum, they can still make assignment on the timely in flow of forces from the Motherland.

If You now given a look to the topographical maps and stopped to consider the vastness of the area in which these troops they will be calls to act, you convince how much is arduous the task they entrusted and as the hopes to arrest in this area the enemy offensive are very tenuous.

You will find, in fact, like the zone of obstacle represented from the Derna Wadi and the Beddahach Wadi that extends towards the west, it is avoidable to short radius, through the strip of easy passable Martuba - Berta debauching in the northern Litoranea and to wider beam for the other relatively easy land zone that from the north of Mechili it heads at Ghagab, ending up on the southern Litoranea.

From Mechili then, for the pre-desert tracks, all the Gebel is gone around and it is ended up on Benghazi.

The land to the West of Tmimi is not sure that even and without the handholds of Marmarica and it concurs good possibility of maneuver. These but, as it is obvious, are proportionate to the entity of the forces in field.

If in the point and the moment in which will deliver the attack of enemy mechanized means, we will not succeed to realize a superiority of means of fire and armor, is from thinking probable that this last defense, even if maneuvered and spaced out in depth, they will be unhinged.

And then the Cyrenaica will be lost. Because the forces covering the rear

of Benghazi (Wadi Bacur-Regima and Scheleidima) and of the territories of the South Cyrenaica (Agebadia-Gialo-Agheila) have little consistency - as you can find from the map to the 1:1,000,000 and can only contrast infiltrations of small mechanized nuclei and not sure an attack in mass.

Therefore, I repeat, the salvation of Libya is entrusted to the troops deployed in the Derna-Berta-Mechili system.

In front of them the adversary will be able to concentrate - in a few days, some week at the maximum - remarkably superior troops, emboldened from success, fed from our same bases of Bardia and Tobruk, and supported from numerous reserves.

If they are true, as unfortunately it they are, the news given from the S.I.M., the English forces in Egypt, amount to almost 17 divisions, have received and they are receiving, from all the parts of the world, reinforces in mechanized means, such armor and to widely compensate the losses endured (see attached summary).

At the front to this new steel avalanche that advances will be able to oppose our 20,000 men with 350 guns and 60 tanks?

Another aspect of the situation that becomes of moment by moment more serious, derives from the disproportion between the counter opposed aerial means.

The 5th Air Fleet, after intense, wearing away the supported effort, *is no more in a position to carrying out offensive actions.*

This has yesterday declared its Commander, His Ecc. Porro.

It cannot put today in line, between bombers and fighters, about eighty aircraft with remarkably inferior characteristics to those of the enemies.

The mass of these - than according to the bulletin of the S.I.M. of 29 December amounts to 700 front line aircraft and 400 reserve - without to count those of the 5 aircraft carriers located in the Mediterranean - every day for the inflow grows more than new aircraft, all of the more modern types. As the same S.I.M., advises, another 477 aircraft already would have arrived or in arrival in Egypt (as from attached report).

In this situation while the aerial offense becomes greater every day, grow weaker for against every reactive possibility of our aviation.

For which, when the offensive is get loosed on Tobruk - practically already begun - we will have passively to be present also in the sky, beyond that for the land and sea.

Neither the situation will be able to change when the enemy himself decides to proceed against the Derna-Berta-Mechili system.

This, Duce, is the hard truth, without sails and attenuations; that truth that to me is appeared and jumped from before the first day of the enemy offensive, *that against the law of inexorable that dominate this*

war in the desert, where an initial unhinging of the system, is not remediable and unraveling is always total.

I know that my telegram 01/0318 of 12 December has provoked easy critics from part of many and has caused the accusing of me who had "lost his head".

It, to the contrary, represented a realistic vision of the drama that consequential would have been carried out.

If a my order had not made so that the Divisions "23 Marzo", "28 Ottobre", "Marmarica" and "Cirene" were embezzled in time from the enemy grip retiring to Bardia, this, that in it simply remained the garrisoned from a veil of G.a.f. then would have been overwhelmed immediately, and the tide of the enemy medium armor would be cast on Tobruk exactly in the days of the 13th and 14th. *In that moment from Tobruk to Benghazi there were not that nuclei of troops and no other basted defensive system.* It was therefore just that I spoke about Tripoli which extreme reduced to worthless from Benghazi to Tripoli equally it did not exist some defense.

Today, as already illustrated above, the things are near little the same ones. Unhinged Tobruk, there is however a defensive organization in depth that in union to the works of mine, interruptions, etc., will be able miraculously to perhaps arrest the enemy advance between Derna and Berta; or in various case delayed on Benghazi - Agedabia *but not stopping them more.*

Between Benghazi and Tripoli nothing very fixed exists than defense or mobile if not the entrenched field of the same Tripoli.

I repeat: *route therefore the Derna - Berta line the Cyrenaica must that moment be considered lost.*

For our part you can it be sure that the land will be contrasted from hold to hold.

The show that in these days remain giving to the troops and the populations of North Africa is simply moving and worthy to be pointed out to the admiration of the world. Covering the ways of this land bathed from much generous Italian blood, You feel the trusting spirit of this our people who, also with the mind tightened from the anguish, serenely face every sacrifice, every hard work, every deprivation with full understanding of its must and attends with admirable calm the events.

Never the order, the discipline, the serenity has been more evident and more felt as in these days.

Concluding, Duce, the salvation of the Libya today is tied to the will of the enemy. Will he want to press beyond Tobruk, or will he be arrested voluntarily on this objective once reached? It will want to dilute his contingents in the conquest and maintenance all Libya or be preoccupied from an eventual complication

Or for the moment to delay and to suspend the advance in Libya for collect to things cleared there?

To these thin wires of the destiny, Duce, today is tied the fate of Libya.

And therefore to us it does not remain that to be useful for every hour, every day, every month (if to this limit of time we arrive) in order to consolidate our positions on the Derna - Berta line, which could become really impregnable and unsurpassable if instead of 20,000 men I could deploy 4 or 5 fortified divisions of mobile artilleries and medium armor for being able at the opportune moment also to perhaps resume the movements and to reject the enemy beyond the frontier.

These forces I cannot be more in Libya since from Tripoli I cannot myself be nothing more removed, indeed it must refund the removed, in order to put that field entrenched in conditions for resisting to a eventual surprise from the West.

They therefore cannot that to come from the Motherland and on this point my judgment it is arrested for devolve to the Joint Chief of Staff that of all this vicissitude, from the July in then, I have held tiny and constantly informed as he turns out from the office actions, therefore the cause genesis and effect will be easy specifically and with it I compute of the responsibilities on which I will ask You for beginning inquiries foe me, opportunely.

Marshal of Italy
Supreme Commander Armed Forces N. A.
Rodolfo GRAZIANI

*Annexed to the letter 2 N. Ris. Pers.
of 6 January 1941*

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES
NORTH AFRICA
GENERAL STAFF

*Recapitulate of the troops and marked means arrived or en route
for Egypt from the 1 December to 6 January*

Indicated by the S.I.M.	<i>Trucks</i>	<i>Armor ed Cars</i>	<i>Tanks</i>	<i>Airc raft</i>
6/12 moved from Iraq	50	10	85	
14/12 disembarked 15,000 English				
22/12 disembarked Port Said			250	
25/12 probably disembarked 1 Div. English				
31/12 Confirmed disembarked 1 Div. Austr. from 29/12 to 4/1 would flow				163
1/1 arrived 6,000 Jews			50	
3/1 Expected by 2/1 20 steamships (4 Bns, 1 Reg. Hv Art., 3,600 Indians		50		172
Expected by 12/1 23 Steamships (with 12,000 men)			70	140
4/1 Journeying from Bassora 10,000 Ind.	200	80	150	
5/1 Arriving at Alexandria 8,000 English				
Total	250	140	605	477

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

7 January 1941

Note for the Duce

In order to adorn to the events manifesting themselves in Libya, after having a tidy withdraw of the Divisions located in Egypt and to have organized for Your express order, Duce, the resistance to the bitter end of Bardia, that as well as it has answered well to Your understandings, Graziani Marshal - as he has noted - has also predisposed successive defense to Ain el Gazala; on the line of Derna, Barce; to Barce, to Benghazi and Agedabia.

The defensive ability to this unexpected system of successive resistances, unavoidably weak and based on the employment of the forces a little by little, if the scope can intend to slow down the enemy impulse, does not seem can consolidate excessive illusions on his ability to arrest the English offensive definitively. And that for a triple order of reasons:

- the considerable mass of mechanized and motorized forces that English have put in field and his ability to express movement, demonstrated, also after the fall of the port of Bardia, with the approach of some means to Tobruk;
- the possibility to maneuver such mass, date the nature of the predisposed land that nearly allows anywhere to go around the defense;
- nearly the absolute mastery of the sea and the consequent possibility of English to take advantage of the naval bases.

In this situation it seems to be the case of swine, the question whether it is appropriate to continue to project piecemeal forces eastward or does not agree to endeavor to be around the 5th Army, with the elements that will be sent to the reconstitution and with large units and our German that are in the process or project to be, a mass of maneuver. This certain task difficult for the amount of media that must be sent to the difficulty of transport and to the low potential of the port of Tripoli. Indeed, it is considered that the transport of a division from Italy to Tripoli will take approximately 15-20 days and the need to increase the potential of that port.

However are, to think next to the constitution of a maneuver mass seem convenient, for having then the possibility of employ in its organic composition that excludes every employment to little by little *a priori* and, also only therefore, little profitable.

As and with which modalities the employment will happen, it could be decided in the course of time, without premature hypotheses, according to the circumstances and the situation that will be come delineating. Several hypotheses can in fact be made:

- employment towards the Cyrenaica in the case the opposite resistance from the successive lines gives ourselves some time and it allows the situation of the forces of the enemy and that one of the neighbor of Regency of Tunisia;
- employment in Tripolitania in order to save that colony in the case the abandonment of the Cyrenaica becomes necessary;
- employment, in order to prevent to the union between the English forces and those French of the Regency of Tunisia, which - it is not pessimism the anticipation - it can soon or later detach itself from the Government of Vichy.

In the case in which the abandonment of the Cyrenaica becomes necessary, I have examined with the respective Chiefs of general staff the situation of the Navy and Aviation.

The abandonment of Tobruk would undoubtedly move the strategic-naval problem in the Mediterranean. English, in fact, having the base of Tobruk, would remarkably improve their situation with the system Alexandria, Candia, Tobruk, Malta. Their general position in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean would turn out strengthened and the control of the Channel of Candia sure guaranteed.

The employment does not seem radically changed the reflecting tactical problem instead, in the consideration that, in case we had confine to Tripoli and the possibility lacked us therefore to locate in permanent way naval units there, not arranging to the need of a equipped base, there would be however equally allow the employment of underwater units to read of surface and. Tripoli in other words could become a very close to a new Tobruk to the Mother country and its support.

With the abandonment of the Cyrenaica the aviation would be in a position to reconstituting in the space of a month its efficiency. In the existing fields and those in via of armament in the Tripolitania sufficient in flow aerial means from the Mother country could in fact be deployed. And that also in the more unfavorable case that had to be sacrificed, for its extreme resistance. all those currently located in Cyrenaica. To the action in Tripolitania it will be able also to allow, from the fields of the Sicily and the base of support of Pantelleria, the aviation of the metropolitan.

This important and comforting verification , because it is obvious that also having a maneuver mass, insufficient would be

our possibilities in case we lacked a powerful mass aviation that was not only opposed to that of the enemy, but struck land means in order to slow down the march and the naval bases, in order to hinder the supplying of materials of every kind and the in flow of troops.

Serious difficulties would have only as far as the line of the Empire: the port of call of Benghazi would have to organize in fact to Rhodes with consequent the serious problem of the supply.

Where in such order of ideas you convene, Duce, could be precise dates directives to Graziani Marshal, according the here enclosed telegram rough draft.

The undersecretary of the Joint Chief of Staff
A. GUZZONI

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

LAND SITUATION

With the fall of Bardia, in Libya remain inclusive of the 5 divisions of infantry, armored forces in route of inflow and equal to another division, various non-divisional troops; all these forces are located in successive lines of resistance:

- *fortified town of Tobruk*: one division plus various elements (27 thousand men) and approximately 300 guns;
- *zone of alignment Derna - Berta - Mechili*: one division (reinforced from some groups of artillery) and one armored brigade; total 20 thousand men, 250 guns, 60 medium tanks;
- *defensive organization of Barce - Bengasi - Agedabia*: with a few forces and insufficient artilleries.
- *zone of Tripoli*: 3 incomplete divisions of infantry, 1 armored division in process of constitution.

The English forces located in Egypt can be estimated 350 thousand men.

Of these:

- 2 armored divisions and
- 3 divisions of infantry

are located around Bardia, between Sollum, Sidi Omar, Bir el Hamza, Bir Belafara, Marsa Lucch, with elements pushed to east, south and the west of Tobruk the whose investment can considered underway

- 2 divisions at Bug Bug,
- 2 divisions at Marsa Matruh,
- 1 division to a hundred of kilometers to the east of Marsa Matruh, still remaining in Egypt.

Independently from the difficulties of the supply - of other part susceptible of remarkable improvement after the eventual fall of Tobruk - the English advance could be slowed down, but very difficult to stop in Cyrenaica.

It is not however to exclude that English arriving at Tobruk, and pushing eventually to Benghazi, are forced to interrupt their advance in the consideration of the enormous extension

of their front line aggravated from the new desert zone (approximately 600 kilometers from Agedabia to Misurata) that they would have to cross and by the lack of ports between Benghazi and Tripoli (approximately 650 kilometers) that they can allow the organization, for marine route, of the supplies.

Also but if English reached Benghazi with the intention to continue, they would be forced to arrest a long time of due exactly to the nature of the land and the enormous difficulties logistical of exceeding.

At Tripoli abundant means are now flowing in order to replace in complete efficiency the three divisions currently located there and in order to constitute the armored division; today moreover the transport of a armored division (Ariete) but supplied of only light tanks, and of a motorized division (Trento) will have begin that they could be in place towards 20 February. We will have then a discreet mass of maneuver to employ offensively against the English, a lot in the case in which they have been arrested in Cyrenaica, a lot in that one in which continue against the Tripolitania; moreover it will prevent their joining with the forces of the Regency of Tunisia that declared dissident from Vichy.

Situation on the whole is serious, but that it cannot remove, neither the will of confrontation, nor the hope of exceed.

THE NAVAL SITUATION

The loss of Bardia and probable next the loss of Tobruk will naturally aggravate the strategic naval situation in the Mediterranean.

Tobruk - for how much of not great importance - will constitute in fact an intermediate base in the sense of the parallels between Malta and Alexandria and arranges with Crete and Alexandria. English will have with that greater possibility to maneuver for in conjunction with the fleet of Gibraltar.

In the appraisal of the possibilities of the English fleet it must but to hold account of the possibilities of the our aviation, which with the aid of the German X Aerial Corps will be able - leaving from the bases of Tripolitania, of the Sicily and supported where it is necessary by Pantelleria - to render the life of the English fleet in its bases difficult and its freedom of movement problematic.

If our strategic-naval situation is therefore clearly inferior and from such forcing at once the English naval initiative, it is from previewing that the traffic through the channel of Sicily will be, for laying a trap as much, however, it is pure with some caution and limitation, always possible.

Our situation will be better it when in March or April our two battleships will be able to return to the fleet and in case the occupation of Gibraltar became possible that would quite reverse our situation.

THE AERIAL SITUATION

The existing fields in Tripolitania, those in via of armament and the greater availability of aircraft - rendered possible with the arrival of the C.A.T. (Air Corp German) and the return of the C.A.I. (Air Corp Italian) - they will allow a deployment of such aviation to delay the advance of the English. Already it has been offered the increase of 100 aircraft; another 100 will be further sent today and 100 on the return of the C.A.I..

The task of air force will however be a very hard one since, beyond the action at the sea, it will have in good part to support the weight of the fight - acting against the armored columns in order to slow down the advance and the naval bases in order to hinder the organization of the supply.

That will involve a remarkable usury that will be able to be compensated with the production, but will not aggravate, in its whole, the strategic aerial problem.

In conclusion, as it has been already said, the situation is serious; it is not deprived of hope, but not even such to exclude that the Cyrenaica, and in progress of time also the Tripolitania can be occupied from English.

Approximately the time being necessary it is difficult to make forecasts. Therefore it would seem opportune given that part of the O.K.W. was arranged the preparation of the German Armored Corps: preparation of which it would follow the shipment in relation to the situation that will be delineated between a month: time presumably being necessary for the preparation of the same body.

That if the situation improved and the preparation of the Armored Corps it was prompter, at least for one division, would be inserted also for transport between that one above pointed out of the *Ariete* armored division and that one of the *Trento* motorized division; and it would be obtained to very early one armored unit supplied with tanks of such power to face those of the English.

on, 8 January 1941-XIX

A. GUZZONI

COMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA

Dispatch on arrival by means of tele-cipher. Transmitted on 25-1-41 - 12:20 Hours

Arrived on 25-1-41 - 13:45 Hours

Deciphered on 25-1-41 - 14:30 Hours

From: Supreme command I.N.A.

To: Comando Supremo

01/1110/Op.-1 25 January 11:00 hours. Continuation of my 01/1056/Op. Situation & my 01/1064/Op of yesterday.

From aerial recognitions & interceptions it turns out more and more obvious that the adversary with Armored Brigades 4th & 7th decidedly pushes ahead also in means at difficulties deriving from the land (that has changed characteristic desert tracks) in order to board escapement Derna - Berta. Some doubt cannot at this point be more nourished that objective enemy is total occupation of Cyrenaica. In the Mechili area appeared yesterday our armored forces have recalled from that part of arrival of those enemies in preponderant number for today. In order to avoid that our armored forces, constituent only availability of the sort, were overwhelmed, I have ordered before night they withdraw towards the north road for Chaulan & wait in power in order to resume action counter-offensive on Mechili. I still have no news with regard to it. Our G. 50 formation in cruise protection on the Armored brigade has this morning shot down 4 enemy Gloster with machine-guns. They will continue action in day. If you had decided in this moment of powerful armored units I would have maneuvered from Mechili on Tmimi going around enemy forces projected before the escarpment between Derna & Berta; therefore as I would have maneuvered from Tobruk on Bardia at the moment of the flow of the enemy on it from Sollum; & therefore still from Derna on Tobruk at the moment of the march on it of the enemy from Bardia. They are instead for 50 days with the arms to act together without to have been able to carry out some counteroffensive action for lack of suitable means & enduring enemy initiative that have completed its successive maneuvers undisturbed as over a theater.

At this point they are in the conditions of a captain who commands his ship in condition of sinking because there are leaks everywhere

part, & that tries to made to float until the last moment. Without to produce impressionism I have supplied in these last days at I clear from Derna & Benghazi national on Tripoli. I have taken to all the dispositions because prefecture of Derna & Benghazi & credit institutions supplied to clear actions & the archives. For against I have decided that Colonization Agency director remains on the place with all colonial families that would not be absolutely possible to clear for lack of means.

Podestà & Vescovi will remain in place for national protection according to laws of religion & war. I in any case ask they give me eventually various directives at holding care but present that national refuse clear via sea & that (I repeat) I do not have means for clear total via earth. For against approximately a thousand between women & children they are ready to leave via airplane but disabled for lack of aerial transport lessened reduced for inner requirements. If possible I ask to send others. Superfluous to add that this precarious situation does not diminish at all the spirit of commanders & of the troops that are decided anywhere to resist to the last one, & that anywhere they reign calm, order, discipline that have provoked to senses of admiration from the German Mission. I have suspended further sending of troop consignments & from the Tripolitania ordering instead 5th Army supplying to the defense of Sirte with the means of which it can decide.

GRAZIANI

GOVERNOR GENERAL OF LIBYA
COMMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER

29 January 1941

Reassumed of the oral communications made by his Excellency the Marshal, supreme commander of Armed Forces N.A., in the meeting held at Berta 29 January 1941, 10:30 hours.

They are present:

Excellency TELLERA - commander 10th army,
Excellency CONA - commander XX army Corps,
Excellency BERGONZOLI - commander Derna Area,
General MOLINARI - supreme commander Engineers,
Colonel SORRENTINO - operations section head Supreme High Command,
Colonel MATRICARDI - Chief G. S. XX C. d'A.

His Excellency the Marshal gives a reading of the telegram 01/1264/Op. directed to the Stamage and premised that he knows the total situation well, therefore he continues:

My judgment on the situation today:

The enemy with his medium armor operating on the direction Mechili - Gars Mragh - De Martino he evidently tries to flow on the south gebelica with the intention of being able to constitute a defensive flank on the connection De Martino - cross-roads Luigi di Savoia - Cirene (depth 15 km. approximately from Cirene to De Martino) with that he would move to cut the two gebeli roads, north and south, closing completely all our deployment of the Gebel. He repeats with this movement, on a very immense field of action, what he has made in first time at Bardia on the meridian of Marsa Luk and that has repeated at Tobruk on the meridian of Ain Gazala. Since this objective is prevented to us today he opposes the simple occupation of Gars Bragh with the Armored Brigade and the point of support of De Martino with the reduced forces in way of in flowing.

Against the enemy he will be able to exercise his pressure with all the VII Armored Brigade, already reinforced from one armored unit of the IV Brigade, forces yesterday parking in the Bir Semander region, most of all, the Eleventh Hussars (armored car) as has already projected along his

tentacles in exploration in the Chaulan - Gars Mragh and perhaps - what not still assessed - on the other director Abiar bu Sfeia - Gerrari - Slonta.

It is not at all from exclude that all the remaining elements of the IV Armored Brigade currently in the south-west Martuba area, given the difficulty of the land towards Derna and in the area of Beddahach Wadi can at the opportune moment be projected by them on the Semander - Gars Mragh - De Martino direction.

For the total force, I judge difficult that the simple Armored Brigade can, beyond a certain limit, resist this pressure.

His Excellency the Marshal consults only the commanders present beginning with his Exc. Tellera: he shares or he does not share this appreciation?

Exc. Tellera answers: I share this appreciation totally.

Exc. Cona: answers that he also shares this appreciation.

Exc. Bergonzoli: not having experienced the situation and not knowing the tactical environment in the southern sector can not give a ruling.

His Excellency the Marshal continues his judgment:

First consideration.

If in a more or less relative time (since Gen. Babini has had compulsory order not to move himself more from Gars Mragh and for resistance to the bitter end, order repeated them also from me this morning orally, by telephone) the enemy succeeds to put into effect his maneuver overran also the defense of the De Martino, all the alignment of the Gebel will be bottled, having preclude both the gebel ways of outflow.

He asks therefore the appreciation on this point.

Exc. Tellera answers: undoubtedly.

Exc. Cona Also answers affirmatively.

Exc. Bergonzoli is of the same warning.

Gen. Molinari he is also of same the opinion.

Second consideration.

As a result of this eventuality - that it would be mortal I wonder: and opportune to continue to hold to the bitter end the occupation of Derna that immobilizes 4 battalions and 8 mobile batteries? Or does not allow decision in time the evacuation, saving the sure loss these forces, with which instead the area of Berta could be strengthened in first phase and in second phase

made to flow on the cross-roads connection south of Cirene-De Martino for you to forestall the enemy maneuver, as long as we are in time? Considering that to formalize wanting to hold a determined point, in war, he is what not to accept and considering that the interruptions already practiced on the hairpin curves el Fteiah - Derna and those to practice on the inner Sidi Garbaa - Derna road under the fort Lombardy and still that to practice in the going back hairpin curves towards Berta, they would force the enemy in a sure time of arrest that, to seeming of the Supreme Commander of the engineers, to this consulted point, he can judge equal to approximately a week for how much is reflected mechanized means transit, in order not to influence with my opinion estimate I ask before the judgment of those present.

Exc. Tellera answers: I agree totally.

Exc. Cona answers: all considering is even I am of this opinion.

Exc. Bergonzoli answers: I agree totally and I had already considered on behalf of this eventuality.

Gen. Molinari answers: without doubt, I see a few factors positive to you and many negatives factors.

However, his Excellency the Marshal continues, before endorsing with my judgment, subjects the consideration of the glare that this decision will carry on cutting off Berta - Fort Camporosso that would come to having its exposed left flank from the moment in which the enemy, repaired the interruption of the fort Lombardy, will be able to deliver the attack on the flank of it.

And that is I ask: will have keeping the occupation or to withdraw the troops that are spaced out in a time parallel or relative?

Premised that in this gravitate eight field battalions plus 5 artillery batteries than and 2 of accompaniment, I in the first place ask a judgment for principle.

Exc. Tellera answers: on the whole it must clear also the stump. In the glares of the time it can be held until when the enemy cannot exercise a serious threat on the flanks of the stump or that other circumstances elsewhere do not advise the use of the numerous troops that garrison the same stump.

Exc. Cona interrupting answers: as principle criterion is favorable to the withdrawal of the troops of the escarpment. Like relative criterion to the time, creed that must be withdrawn at once, and that is contemporarily to the forces of Derna, the troops of stump the more eastward until to that point where it will have to be constituted, outside of the enemy contact, a defensive front - front to east, between Berta and Derna. Because I think that the interruptions do not constitute obstacle for major unit of infantry that advance even if the interruptions are not completely repaired.

Exc. Bergonzoli: favorable on the whole. For the time I agree with the opinion of Exc. Cona, adding that, given constitution of the Australian units lacking baggage train, the XX Corp. I think will have greater time available in order to carry out movement.

Gen. Molinari answers: the withdraw, regarding the time, is more in function of the threat to our right (el Mragh - Gerdes Gerrari) that not to the repair of the interruption. Therefore estimated the situation, not only local, the withdraw sure speed must to farces with a gradually. The maneuver must be in function of the enemy maneuver that threatens our right.

His Excellency the Marshal therefore continues:

My judgment: on the whole, without another decisive one. For the time I agree with much Exc. Cona said. In depth, or for or other consideration, we are all of agreement on this point.

Third consideration.

That I place the question that weighs on the full responsibility above all and: in that moment to order the maneuver? There no is doubt that in that field the time of arrest provoked for the enemy to cause, above all of the difficulties of the land and the truce nearly nonchalant of the moment, is subordinated to the development of his penetration towards De Martino and that this factor is to us favorable for remove them in useful time, I think that the movement must be carried out without delay.

We will get back 13 battalions and 15 batteries that, in the insufficient economy of our forces, represent a very considerable value.

A shortening of our front will be achieved Berta - Eluet el Asel - Chaulan - Gars Mragh. The possession of the De Martino axis will be able to be guaranteed with precedence on the enemy - cross-roads Luigi di Savoia - Cirene.

We will have the possibility to make to flow down eventually with long facility the axis of the two road opens to truck traffic that offer successive consolidation lines which the Sidi Abd el Nahed - Mameli - Slonta and the Gars Benigden - Bir Gandula - Gars el Megiair, on which last point the Command of the Army will be able to predispose and to preview end of the hour of out flow - in all or in part according of the circumstances - of the mobile nuclei of the Command of the Barce Area.

We will have the line el Garib - Tecniz - Gerdes el Abid and finally still the other Wadi Bacur el Abiar - Regima - Sceleidima in order to oppose the last resistance on the first escarpment of the Gebel supporting the defense to points already pre-established and occupied from the nuclei of the Benghazi cover area.

We will contrast that advance of the enemy and the land hand to hand, facilitated from the easy lines of defense and the interruptions already predisposed that they will have to delay the out flow enemy which,

while, it will go more and more lengthening his logistic lines dangerously. The reserves at the disposition of the Comando Superiore already located at Soluk before tomorrow will be constituted from an machine-gun armed battalion, group of 75/27 with 2 bty., once tank bn. and from the 2nd Celere artillery reg., with which the reserves of the Comando Superiore can be in conditions for contrasting the enemy advance on Agedabia.

For all these reasons are worth the pain to abandon Derna to in spite of the sorrow that such decision can cause.

I ask if someone present has anything still to do.

All - Exc. Tellera, Exc. Cona, Exc. Bergonzoli and Gen. Molinari - answer negatively.

As a result of that, His Excellency the Marshal concludes, the Command of the Army is authorized me to emanate his operations orders from this moment, 12:10 hours of 29 January.

I raise to name of all the thought to the far homeland of which with a fist of men we defend here and we will defend until the last moment the honor!

*Prime Minister to the minister of the War and
the head of General G. S. Imperial.*

6 January 1941

1. W.S. 5A already has departed and "B" leaves immediately. Therefore these not arrived there. They altogether transport 55,000 men of which 12,000 are for India, etc, and 43,000 for the Middle East. Of the 43,000 for the Middle East, approximately 22,000 they are for the combat units and recruits and 21,000 specialists, troops transports and varied personnel, of which approximately 4,000 for the navy and air force. Therefore the army in the Middle East receives 22,000 combatants and 17,000 other men.

2. The present composition of the army in the Middle East (excluding the nearly 70,000 of the Kenya and Aden) amounts therefore to 150,000 men of combatant troops. They follow 40,000 men of the troop assigned to the lines of communications and 20,000 to the bases, and elsewhere... that is 150,000 plus 60,000. To these 22,000 combatants and 17,000 of other kind will join soon, transported from the W.S.5. A and B, for which a total of 172,000 will be combatants and 77,000 employed in the rear.

3. The convoy W.S.6, now loading, contain 8,500 combatant more 4,000 recruit, a part of the which - say 2,500 - part of the total of the combatant to 11,000, exclude the mobile naval base, composed of 5,300 man (of the which will discuss later on), the RAF (therein comprise the school of pilotage on order from Capetown) and the Navy, with 7,000 man, 2,000 French free and approximately 9,000 of the service of other kind. After the arrival of this convoy the total forces in the Middle East will comprise 183,000 assigned combatants and 85,000 to the services: that is, one will be had proportion of 15 to 7. To this point the progressive worsening in the proportion between combatant troops and the services in the rears must be noticed.

4. But the - category "combatant troops" demands another accurate analysis. We are informed, as an example, than the 7th Australian division, of 14,800 men, is not trained and in great part not equipped; then there is the division of cavalry of 8,500 men whose mechanization has still not made progresses and that in reality

cannot be considered combatant troop if not for the task that it has to maintain the order on the place. There are other units that I could cite and that they are not combatant troops in the true sense of the word: we say 6,000. Therefore 29,000 men would have to be reduced from the total of the combatants, reducing from 183,000 to 154,000 in order to increase in compensation the number of that makes part of the services in the rear, that from 86,000 rises to 115,000. The army of the Middle East (excluded the 70,000 in the Kenya and to Aden) has therefore 154,000 combatants and 115,000 men in the rears, in the inefficient services and (to exception of the garrison services). The proportion of the not efficient ones appears much too elevated. It must remember that every division would be possible to further reduce the number of the effective as combatants or group of brigade has the own advanced organization of transports and is considered an unit that lives with own means. Moreover not must forget that in order nourish all this troop in the rear, not organized or however inefficient, be state necessary reduce considerably the rations of the British people, that further cut be in sight and that every man and every ton of supplies must complete the circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope with serious risk in order the threat of the submarine, of the attack from the air and of that one of enemy warship, on ship the which travel of go and return demand, with the relative operation of cargo and drainage, not less of four month. And therefore must of all the honest persons, in native land or the Middle East, to try to increase the number of the combatants and to hold as low as possible that one of the services in the rears. And that one could be obtained shining affirmation of organizational character which could here carry to result in the economy of the war comparable to those obtained with a considerable Victory on the field.

5. If it could assure to me that the plethora of destined men to the services, transported from foretold convoys W.S.5 A and B and W.S.6, will serve to raise the moral and to render the 29,000 inefficient combatants efficient, cited in paragraph 4, I would be content. It will be able, as an example, the 7th Australian division to receive now the necessary services for place it in a position to not only operating on the place? The division of cavalry of 8,500 men will become a mechanized, unit able to operate under shape of brigades or at least regiments, against the enemy? In such case, also remaining the proportion of the not combatant troops, than now they crowd the convoys, still too much high, the army of the Middle East would acquire a greater offensive potential and the delay in the shipment of the 50th division would become bearable. It can give that some consoling news arrives to us in purpose.

The issue if convene more to send the I Brigade of the 50th division indeed that the Mobile Naval base with convoy W.S.6 has not been resolved. However the preparations find in one stage the

too much advanced in order to render a change of the plan convenient. This matter will have tomorrow to be considered (day 7) from the Committee of the Chiefs of the G. S. holding present that the division will remain inactive in order of nearly three months.

6. Otherwise it is necessary to approve of the shipment of the W.S.6 (reduced to 34,000 or less) as now proposed. I deplore deeply the composition therefore turning out of the army of the Middle East. When all these convoys will have arrived, the total of men from it transported will amount to 240,000 plus 43,000 plus 20,000 altogether more than 300,000 to which must add the 70,000 of Aden and in Kenya - total: 370,000 men to pay and to nourish. Of this enormous army the total recognizable military units like combatants, is following:

- 6th Australian division;
- one New Zealand division, comprising two groups of brigade;
- 4th Indian division;
- 5th Indian division;
- XVI infantry brigade;
- 2nd armored division;
- 7th armored division (incomplete);
- 6th British division (incomplete).

To that the combatant units formed with the 70,000 men in the Kenya and in Aden join: the two South African brigades, two brigades of Western Africa and local forces of the East Africa. One hopes that to these arrive soon: a) the completion of the aforesaid incomplete units; b) a seventh British division, composed from the men who do not find other employment and from those retrieved sifting the services in the rears;

- The 7th Australian division.
- and one division of mechanized cavalry.

With this it have arrived approximately ten divisions between infantry, armor, cavalry, more, we place, one division from the Kenya: 11 Divisions total. But also this would be a poor harvest therefore for an immense field.

COMANDO SUPREMO
IL DUCE

6 February 1941

*To Marshal Rodolfo Graziani
Supreme Commander Armed Forces of the I.N.A.*

SIRTE

I refer to your 01/1376. Op. of the current and to you my precise directives of principle.

1) The defense of the Tripolitania will have to be carried out, not already around Tripoli, but as ahead as possible, is in order to hold English far away from the port where must disembark reinforcements necessary, it is in order protect the air force bases more effectively.

You will give therefore battles on positions of Your choice, sufficiently far from Tripoli and such to force the English to fight with the desert to the rear.

2) Allow a few troops (essentially the G.a.F. and a few mobile elements) in the fortress of Tripoli and cover to the western frontier, you will employ the infantry units, except mobile, for the defense in place, on said positions of your choosing to obstruction of the Litoranea and its adjacency.

3) The Italian and German mechanized units will have to be employed - actually that possible for entire Divisions and always offensively - firstly in the delaying defense of the Sirte, profiting of every favorable occasion in order to pass to the offensive in depth so as to inflict on the English how many losses as possible; secondly which reserves of maneuver of the position from Your choice, in order to act on the flank and the rear of the enemy.

4) Hold present in the Sirte the importance of the Oases of Zella and Socna, for the action that through the English could develop on the flank and rear of our alignment.

5) Not consider a action coming from forces from Tunisia or south since, in spite of the French inner situation, I think that the Degaulist can turn large offenses against of us, and that especially in consideration of the pressure improbable that the Germans and Italy are in a position to exercising on French ground.

In case, then, of a large De Gaullist offenses after having been verified, and only in such case, you will be able to always distract a part of the mechanized forces (to entire units) for giving reactivity to the defense that you will predispose in small sight possible infiltrations from south and the west on Tripoli.

6) Your prospect, finally, the possibility that English try invasion; it is necessary therefore to carefully surveillance and the coastal defense and to arrange obstructions of mines especially in the Misurata-Homs section.

7) The more important bases of Cyrenaica will have more intensely to be struck by aviation as much and continuously it will be possible. That will bring the most effective contribution to the slowing down of the advance of the English, which, for being able to continue in the offensive towards the west, find themselves in the unavoidable necessity to use the bases of Benghazi and Derna.

8) Rest in wait to know the orders that you will give for the defense of the Tripolitania on the basis of the present directives.

MUSSOLINI

COMMANDO SUPERIORE ARMED FORCES NORTH AFRICA

To: *Comando Supremo*

01/1580/Op. 9 February 21:00 hours. Received sheet n. 6239/Op. The directives contained in it above all reflect the situation that will be had when a major unit will be added in affluence. While held account of the means of which today it is arranged I have given to the following dispositions already in action

- 1) Sirte area *with* function of 1st arrest & contact.
- 2) Joining on the line of the Margheb to Homs of all the troops in outflow from the Cyrenaica for construction of a strong point obstruction of the roads for Tripoli & Kussabat.
- 3) Only major unit of maneuver today is the "Ariete" Division of insufficient efficiency that will have in case the task of maneuvers on flank & on the rear of the enemy from Tarhuna for Kussabat also from Beni Ulid for Zliten.
- 4) The Divisions that currently fortify the entrenched field do not have as noted baggage train & do not have possibility to be airborne for lack of motor vehicles. They would have therefore to make movements on feet for long distances without adequate means of transport.
- 5) I have to make to consider that ground in Homs by Sirte has no tactical grip firmly on which to lean, it lends itself so well to the usual maneuver infiltration & bypass in pre-desert areas where now the enemy is experienced possessing such organization of links starting from the High Command branches down to every single armored car & tank that is so driven as on the table game. On the other hand you can not count on the logistical difficulties because as past experiences have shown even with the overwhelming availability of mechanized means of which the enemy is gifted he has a chance to overcome hundreds of kilometers. Sirte topographically compares at Sidi Barrani. Establish a strong forward-deployed would dangerously expose to the same end. Zliten to Misurata & terrain features but does not change much anyway for handholds offered by Oasis (if there were also if you will be on pace

the armored cars means) it offer good possibility for guerrilla warfare. A line for against of sufficient natural robustness on which to support them is therefore only that one of the cited on Margheb. Around to this hinge our action of counter-maneuver will be able to my opinion to really develop also of maneuver to according to the enemy means outflank them also to invest them, for the street complex Tarhuna-Homs.

Based on these considerations since day of the 5th I have ordered to the Commander of the "Ariete" Division to complete the relative reconnaissance of roads & land. In following conclusion is my operating concept: to withhold enemy until that possible in the Sirtica not worrying themselves to the case of having to lose at last Misurata & Zliten. To attract under the strong point of Margheb. Adhere them in the rear also on the flank when it will board it counterattack in case it meant instead avoid him for the indicated street complex over. This maneuver if completed with the means motorized of which today arranges ("Ariete " Division) offers itself insufficient possibility of resolution.

If instead it will be able complete when the Armored Corp will be all ready, succeeding will give certainty of. In order to withhold while the enemy there it is not in this meantime other means that the today here is the aviation which to the contrary in the maximum of inefficiency.

GRAZIANI

ROYAL EMBASSY OF ITALY
BERLIN
OFFICE OF THE MILITARY ATTACHÈ

Berlin, 31 October 1940-XIX

N. 2592/A.

Subject: Negotiations for German support in the operations in the Mediterranean basin.

*To the Ministry of War
Cabinet*

ROME

For completion of the *note* already sent by telegram *I report* with greater particular on the development of the conversations on the three groups of issues that form object of the current negotiations, that is:

- *shipment of German armored units to Libya;*
- *supply of armament materials;*
- *supply of raw materials.*

The conversations with the military authorities have begun with a short meeting in which Marshal Keitel has exposed some considerations of general character as basis of the negotiations.

I have already reported with regard to telegram.

I put now in reference some points:

- necessity program of long expiration graded in order of urgency;
- time being necessary because the contribution of German materials can reach the units; such time is in great part in function of the transports;
- necessities that were sent to the front, for first, all the materials however available in Italy. The units that remaining lacking in materials would come rearmed with the materials supplied by the Germans, for whose employment a convenient period of training is necessary;
- limitation of the German resources, for effect of the consumptions endured and the requirements of the widening and the rearrangement;

- necessity that comes applied also in Italy all the restrictive measures in the cares of some raw materials already put into effect in Germany and comes employed, in the widest measure, products substitution transforming into how much is possible the fabrication processes. The greater difficulties regard copper, some corrective ones of the steel, rubber and combustible liquids;

- assignment for our supplies on materials of war booty, which moreover are still in part not remittances in efficiency and in part they demand long transports. Eventuality that the rearrangement of the materials and the transport must be executed to care of Italy;

- difficulties that are introduced for the rail shipments.

Shipment of German armored divisions to Libya.

The conversations with regard to this have been entrusted by Marshal Keitel to General Jodl. These have pointed out first of all; with much tact and declaring that the issues are by now beyond passages:

- that, in past, a sure "crisis of confidence" has been taken place between Italy and Germany for which it was not possible to send to Libya the armored division that had been promised by Germany;

- that the German Command considers that having declared the war on Greece has constituted a serious military error, much more than it has lead to a failure. That premised General Jodl has declared:

1) no limit will come place to the German assistance, but whom they can derive from the consideration of the true common military interest;

2) the Führer wishes to avoid at all costs that German units are put in conditions for enduring not a failure but a loss of prestige, that it must instead remain intact which it has asserted itself after the great result obtained in this war;

3) Germany is sure of Victory. Not there is some possibility that the Germany is battered, neither for internal crises, since Germany never has been in the joined history therefore as now, nor for hunger because before Germany succumbs for hunger would starve hundreds of million inhabitants of the occupied countries. The Germany is militarily un-attackable, proceed from some destruction that could endure for effect of the aerial offense;

4) if Germany wins, the Italy also wins, which can be sure to receive as much as it must have.

* * *

Subsequently General Jodl has represented the military situation in the following way:

The aerial and marine war against England comes continued incessantly. Continuous aviation to act to mass against eight great industrial complexes. The effects are extraordinarily large: The fires destroy still more of the explosive bombs; particularly the workshops are sensitive to fires.

The losses of the English shipping increase continuously. The war against the traffic not only comes lead with submarines but also with battleships; two of these act currently in the Atlantic.

The situation of the supplying is for England a very serious one; the same English confess it.

As far as the operations previewed against Greece, General Jodl informs that two divisions, of which one Armored and one motorized, to be already in Rumania. It is previewed the employment of twenty divisions approximately, of which 2 mountain; designated commander of the operating troops is Marshal List. The transports will demand approximately 2,000 trains and they will intensively be carried out to begin from first January, in reason of 50 (fifty) trains to the day. It is previewed the throwing of 2 great bridges on the Danube, in order to carry out the transfer from Rumania to Bulgaria. The throwing of these bridges will demand from two to three weeks and will come begun at the end January, but coming from impediments of ice. The operations against Greece, through the frontier Greek-Bulgarian, will not be able to have beginning that in the first fortnight of March, but is sure that the pressure on Greece will be made to feel well before, as soon as will not be obvious the first concentrations in Rumania. The construction of the bridges, in particular, will not lack to arouse apprehensions in the Greek Command. News with regard to already leaked out. Therefore, as an example, the United press has already published news from Budapest, according which give 300 to 350,000 Germans would be concentrated in Rumania and other news, according which, 18 German divisions would have to move into Bulgaria.

The things, will be conduct so that the entity of the German troops will have to be estimated in way much advanced to the truth. All adding is from allowing that the Greek General Staff will have enough soon to be induced to weaken the Albanian front.

General Jodl has made some points out to the *general situation of the German forces*, saying that all the divisions for Rumania are already ready and in full efficiency, other forces is ready for the eventual completion of the occupation of France, while great part of the divisions is not currently employable because it had to yield a part of their forces as nucleus for the constitution of the new units. Therefore, as an example, for the infantry it has been yielded a third regiment; they come therefore framed the new contingents called to arms. The new divisions

will be ready, in successive groups, for the first one of everyone of the next months. All the divisions will be ready before 30 April n.y.

In southern France, they are ready, and in training course, the forces predisposed for the occupation of Gibraltar. The main task is entrusted to a mountain hunter regiment and 2 battalions pioneers, with numerous artillery. It is estimated that the occupation of Gibraltar can be completed in 3 days.

Spain for other still does not decide itself. Franco is preoccupied and wants to wait, for the participation, better perspectives. An further diplomatic attempt, near Franco, would have to be carried out next.

A particular signal has been made to the mountain divisions available, of which: 2 are destined in Rumania, 1 is in course transfer, the one (first mountain division) have been aliquoted for the operation against Gibraltar and remaining in Norway.

As far as the *Italian theaters*, General Jodl has premised that the 10th "Flieger-Korps" (aerial Corps), sent now to Italy, must carry a remarkable contribution for the action against the English in the Mediterranean.

This aerial Corps comprises Stuka (Ju 87) squadrons, with Ju 88, Me 110, Me 111 and Fw 200 aircraft; altogether approximately 180 aircraft plus a group of transport airplanes. For now the aerial Corps will not only act against Greece but against the English.

The German Command thinks that *Albania does not have to be lost in any way*. Valona does not have to be yielded. The loss of the current situation would come to compromise the alignment of the German troops against Greece.

The interests therefore of the German Command is to know if the *Italian Comando Supremo thinks of being able to guarantee the possession of the current front in Albania*.

General Jodl has observed that the troops more indicated for the employment on the current front are mountain troops. He knows already that 4 Italian mountain divisions are found in Albania. Question if tasks not to remove from the western frontiers also the *Taurinense* mountain division, since from France Italy must fear nothing, because the Germany would take part to the first signal and would occupy all France in 3 days.

That premised the question to know if our Commander thinks to have need of the co-operation of German troops in Albania. Such co-operation were to be represented by mountain troops, of which currently is available only a reinforced regiment, because the remaining troops of the 1st division is held ready for Gibraltar . Moreover the Führer is contrary to the employment of weak unit

and therefore it would come taken in consideration the employment of a mountain division, which the action against Gibraltar would be particularly possible where had to be delayed.

In conclusion General Jodl asks to know from the Italian Comando Supremo thinks if German mountain division the co-operation is indispensable. With reserving of the decisions on part of the Führer, he adds that the division would only be sent if necessary, but that it convene to avoid that the case already repeated verifications for the shipment of one armored division to Libya.

Passing to the examination of the situation in Libya General Jodl pressed that according to the O.K. *is absolutely necessary to prevent that English joining with French North-Africa*. General Gandin recognized the gravity of the situation confirmed from how much has exposed with regard to. The German Command had initially thought that the military co-operation could limit itself to sending of units of arrest (Sperrverbände), that they could have comprised, as an example two motorized machine-gun battalions, two tank destroyer groups, some pioneers battalions, some artillery, a motorized recon unit. Such units could be in condition, with abundant employment of mines, to assure the maintenance of a very extended fronts. Jodl examined and discussed the situation he has had to recognize that such units would not be sufficient and that for the goal represented by the Italian Command the employment of armored units would become indispensable.

General Jodl reserved to make the consequent proposals for the Führer and points out to the possibility of the comprising shipment of an armored Corp units armor and motorized, with a force at least 250 tanks, which in adding to the 150 tanks, of which will arrange Marshal Graziani next, could represent an adequate force.

In the examination of the issue it has been taken in consideration the hypothesis that the German armored Corp comes transported initially in the zone of Tripoli, but then to transferable to Cyrenaica where the situation became stabilized.

General Jodl basing on the experience of the operations in Norway thinks very useful to resort to the employment of the ships from war for the transport of the personnel, like surer means for the safety of the same personnel.

For my part prospect, pointing out simply some issues that a lot will interest the German Command at the moment from the realization and precisely:

- the aerial defense of the disembarkation and boarding zones;
- the certain protection of the convoys, that guarantees it the minimal risk of losses, particularly in men, which would be very sensitive for the Führer;

- the good regulations of the dependencies, that you respect the obvious susceptibilities of the German Command.

The General Jodl has implicitly declared being the employment of the German mercantile ship lying in the Italian ports, which he would comprise currently 18 efficient ships, between the 3 and 4 thousand tons.

Reassuring on this issue I have had the impression that Jodl personally has been persuaded of the necessity of the co-operation of German armored troops in Libya and that therefore it will introduce the proposal favorably. This moreover, will be taken in examination in its several tiny aspects, therefore that it is from previewing that will not be introduced to the Führer if not before three or four days. The answer therefore will be still made to await for some days.

Supply of armament material

I have already telegraphed the highly summarized result. A particular report comes sent from his Exc. General Fautilli.

Supplies of raw materials

It turn out to me that on such issue whose examination will last still some day, his Exc. General Favagrossa has already obtained some sensitive results.

In the complex I have had the clean impression that the current negotiations are carried out from the German part with much understanding, candor, cordiality and with result much wider than as much as up to now had been manifested. It is moreover necessary always to await the answer definitive.

The R. Military Attache
(General E. Marras)

REPORT OF THE TALKS WITH THE GERMAN SIDE
FOR THE DEMAND WAR MATERIALS FOR THE ARMY

The talks in reference to the cession of war materials for the Italian army have been begun 30 December c.y. with a meeting held by General Keitel with four Italian Generals.

General Keitel has put in evidence that it is not true there is much war material in Germany.

The same day the talks with General Thomas, bordered by numerous experts have had a beginning.

1) In merit to the previous demands nothing of it is objected for as much as follows:

- completion of the 21 batteries of 88 A/A.;
- supply of 100 tank destroyer pieces of 37 with 100,00 rounds;
- supply of 10 howitzer batteries of 149/30 with 120,000 rounds.

Concerning:

-800 *trucks* promised opportunely to Colonel Girola and for which General Marras had confirmed the demand, General Thomas have declared that *he could do now only 150*.

General Thomas has added but that in occupied France French trucks are not approximately 17,000 p.b. and that among these approximately 3,000 trucks they are from believed *in optimal conditions, rubberizing*.

It is necessary therefore that appropriate personnel in the localities where the trucks necessary for the choice are found.

- twenty batteries self-propelled artillery.

It was answer in explicit way that is not possible to give anything.

- the ten batteries of heavy caliber.

This demand has been transformed as follows: long range artilleries, for the defense of the coasts, bore of not inferior to 149.

To the demand heavy batteries of *Germans 149*, General Thomas has answered that nothing could be done.

General Thomas has offered, instead:

a) 48 pieces of the French gun of 155 Schneider mod. 1917 - the maximum throw 17 km. - with total of 74,000 rounds.

Draft of material already used for the coastal defense, but without special installation nor central fire control.

The material are found at Augsburg.

It is necessary to go to see.

Now in delivery;

b) in place of 300 tank destroyer guns of 20 mm. from Czechoslovakia, General Thomas offers 50 machine-guns of 20 mm.: the ammunition existence must be assessed.

He makes to reserve to report on the other 250 arms and relative ammunition.

2) He has been passed later on to the examination of the demands for the last note.

- *Divisional batteries account.*

Cannot be supplied transported by pack animal batteries neither truck mounted, nor the German 105 mm. howitzer.

General Thomas offers:

- one hundred batteries of Skoda howitzers of 100 mm. mod. 14/19 with 266,000 shells and 240,000 shells' shrapnel, with box every two rounds;

- one hundred pieces of the howitzer of French 105 mod. 35; they lack only given on the supply and the constructive designs.

Now in delivery. Material moving to Braunschweig. Perfect state of use, ready for the employment.

- *Army corps artilleries*

Having been demanded:

-10 howitzer batteries of 149/30 equal to those already granted;

-20 batteries guns for army corps of 105.

General Thomas has refused for the batteries of 105 guns; for those of *howitzers* he has said that could given expectably *only in the summer* (beginning from July) *with 3,000 rounds* for piece.

Are *at once available* 120 (and perhaps also more) short guns from 155 Schneider mod. 15-17, with 3,000 rounds per gun.

Weight of the piece in battery 2,300 kg., the maximum range 12,000 m.

The material is found in Baviera, ready for the employment.

- *Antiaircraft Batteries of 88 mm. Krupp.*

Reserves for answer from the O.K.L.

- *One hundred tank destroyer batteries*

Tank destroyer pieces of 37 millimeter. and 47 millimeter not available.

General Thomas offers instead:

-250 pieces of 25 millimeter. Hotchiss (Vo -950 m/s);

-250 Belgian pieces of 47 (Vo -720 m/s approximately);

with 300,000 common and armor-piercing rounds for the 47; 320.000 rounds for the 25.

One does not know if it is had constructive designs.

Material ready for the delivery.

- *Tanks*

Germany cannot be yielded tanks.

General Thomas offers:

-50 French tank type B2

weight 32 tons.

length m. 6

width m. 2.60

height m. 2.80

armor from 11 to 60 millimeter

speeds 25 km. per hour

armament: 1 piece of 75; 1 piece of 47; 2 machine-guns; 5 men

autonomy 120 km.

Delivery: 30 on 15 January without radio;

20 on 15 March with radio.

For the first 30 tanks successive completion of the material radio;

-50 Somua tanks weight

23 tons. length m. 5.20

width m. 2.10

height m. 2.30

armor from 25 to 50 millimeter

range 200 km. per hour

speed 30 km. armament: 1 gun from 47 and 1 machine-gun bound together; 6 men.

Delivery: 25 mid February

25 mid March complete with radio.

-350 Renault type 35

weight 12 tons.

length m. 4

width m. 1.90

height m. 2.03

Armor from 10 to 45 millimeter

range 200 km.

speed 20 km. per hour

armament: 1 gun of 37 millimeter; 1 machine-gun; 2 men.

Delivery: 76 now

from February 25 per month

without radio.

Ammunition exists for them in imprecise amount.

The material moving from Paris. It is necessary that a commission see them.

- *Armored cars.*

Negative answer.

- *Radio stations.*

Negative answer.

- *A/A Floodlights and listeners.*

Reserves for answer from the O.K.L.

- *Antitank mines.*

50,000 "T mines" German ;

200,000 "S" German;

Reservoir to communicate the number of antitank mines of French war booty.

They can be supplied, moreover, quantitative following of French war booty mines:

Mod. 36 Nr. 116,000

Antitank mines legg. Nr. 86,000

Mod. 37 Nr. 3,000

Campioni will reach Berlin.

3) Materials on which it is necessary to gather information:

- material from 75 French with circumstance installations;

reserves to answer;

- explosive - nitrocellulose:

General Thomas did not have elements for an answer;

- material of connection:

* cables from 14 lines, null;

* cable from 4 lines, null;

* radio apparatuses and field telephones, exist from war booty reserves to answer;

* equipment of materials of connection for batteries of C. d'A , null;

* radio material for tanks, null beyond that one pre seen with the French tanks

- Various material:

* 20,000 tons. barbed wire, is possible make it in little time;

* 500,000 small poles iron, null;

* 10,000,000 sand bags, solo in bitumata paper;

* 500 stretch from field for command and services, null;

* field kitchens, null;

* machine-pistols for parachutists: 2,000 machine guns from 9. millimeter, type Steyr - Solothurn,
or machine-pistols German 18/1.

Can also be supplied:

- * 100,000 guns bore 6.5 Mannlicher;
- * 2,700 light machine-guns Lewis cal. 6.5;
- * 820 heavy machine-guns cal. 6.5 Schwarzlose;
- * 820 Hotchiss mod. 14 French cal. 6.5.

Foretold total arms with 62 million ammunition

* 400 heavy mortars (analogous to the 81 Brand) with supply on which it makes reservoir approximately amount.

- * 1,000,000 of rounds Rheinmetall tank destroyer of 20 millimeter;
- * 2,000,000 of rounds Rheinmetall guns of 80 mm..

Of the oral present they have been written up 3 exemplary in Italian language and German language.

Berlin, 30 December 1940-XIX.

COMAMDO SUPREMO
JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF

Decisions dealing in the meetings of 19 January 1941 at Berchtesgaden, between the undersecretary General Guzzoni of the Italian G. S. General and Marshal Keitel and General Jodl of the German Supreme Command.

Gen. Guzzoni exposes the Italian situation in the 4 theaters of operations: Albania, Italian North Africa, Italian East Africa, Dodecanese. He points out then to problems of armistice with France and supply.

ALBANIA - The current situation, also not being still perfectly consolidated, is such, for the quantitative one of forces sent into the Albanian territory, make it a certainty that the Greeks will not reach the objectives of Berat and Valona that they resolve to do.

If it has not been able to obtain more, that has had the insufficient ability in the Albanian ports essentially which, altogether, do not allow to disembark, in average, more than 2,500 Tons to the day.

This figure makes to comprise without other as it is absolutely impossible to think more to the shipment next to Albania that a German division as has been offered from German side.

For a conveniently lightened division will be made possible in order that to insert them in the picture of our transports.

Circa our offensive intentions, held account of the situation and the relatively short time that by now separates to us from the beginning of the German action from Bulgaria against Greece, will not be feasible that to re-unite a mass of 10-12 divisions, among which are 4 mountain divisions, opportunely incomplete, 3 divisions of new shipment, the German mountain division and some other divisions of infantry reorganized in Albania.

Such mass will act in the direction of Korcia and therefore of Florina and Kastoria. This direction turns out most profitable in as much as is more adherent to the German action towards Salonicco and has resolute influence on all the southern field, through castling the road of Erseke-Kalibaki, while that would not be taken place in the case of the northern field, in case chosen as an attack direction that one of the Epirus.

Marshal Keitel agrees totally.

Beyond Florina it would not be possible to continue without a contribution of motor vehicles: they are already necessary, in fact, it withdraws logistic in order to push little more to Florina that 10 divisions.

For ulterior developments of the operations he would need therefore, preventively to resolve the logistic problem, taking advantage of to the need the station of Florina, which they would have to make you transport head to carry out through Yugoslavia. The Marshal Keitel finds that this solution does not appear possible and he demonstrates itself doubtful circa the possibility of supplying for us from Salonico, once conquered by the Germans.

Our preparation for the offensive would demand more than two months: but, it will be made by degrees, way to have the possibility to march before, not for giving battle but in order to take advantage of the financial ruin that could take place in Greece also before the effective entered in action of the Germans.

Gen. Jodl makes present that in relation to the action on Salonico (to the end of March the German command could be completed the throwing of the bridges on the Danube) had thought to send more to Albania than one division and just a "mountain Corps" with 2 mountain divisions, each with two regiments and 4 artillery battalions: 1st and 4th; 1st one of the best ones, constituted from Bavarian elements, and the 4th of new constitution but with regiments of old constitutions. With army corps troops of (artillery, tanks, antiaircraft) the total force of 36,000 men, 9,200 mules would have to reach, 4,000 vehicles (of which 2,000 motor vehicles). Trains being necessary for the transport: 300. 9 German steamboats would have been put at their disposition. Duration of the transport: 33 days.

The 1st division would be ready at once.

The transport would have to be begun at the end of February aim for have them to end of March.

General Jodl asks if such transport could be effected without to prevent the normal supplying of Albania.

General Guzzoni answers that the amount of troops indicated is too much strong; that it would be much profit may to decide, but that it could not absorb them if not abdicating to complete and to supply our divisions in Albania. It would have, therefore, to limit themselves to send to Albania one single mountain division and with reduced services.

Towards the middle of February the transport could have beginning.

General Jodl makes present that it is necessary, on the argument, one new decision of the Führer.

NORTH AFRICA - In Cyrenaica the attack at Tobruk, garrisoned by one reinforced division is imminent. Marshal Graziani has decided to put into effect the extreme defense of the Cyrenaica on the Derna-Mechili line where 1 division reinforced by 1 armored brigade is deployed, in way of constitution to the southern wing, and by unit of artillery,

machineguns, anti tank weapons and accompaniment from the divisions of Tripoli. Successive defense are organized at Benghazi and Agedabia. Also Giarabub resists well superior English forces.

They are, moreover, there in action already transport to you order to replace in efficiency the 3 remaining divisions to garrison the entrenched field of Tripoli and for the shipment of the *Ariete* armored division (but equipped with light tanks) and of the *Trento* motorized division.

The transport previewed for the German unit for Libya opportunely would be inserted between that one of the *Ariete* division and that one of the *Trento* division.

General Jodl specifies that the German unit is one Light division "5th leichte Division" under the command of general Funk, already in Libya for the reconnaissance. This is a special unit created on purpose in order to fight tanks: 9,300 men, 200 motor vehicles, 111 anti-tank pieces.

For the transport 240 trains are necessary and will be available 12 German steamboats that are previewed can leave 4 to the day. The transport will last approximately 45 days.

The unit will be ready to embark from 15 February and afterwards.

The composition of the division is following:

Division Command;

Scouting group (2 companies armored cars, 1 company motorcyclists, 1 company heavy weapons);

3 Groups "tank hunters" each with 3 companies, of 9-12 tank destroyer pieces (from 50 or 37 millimeter.) each. (In total 30 tanks mod. 3 with undercarriages adapted for transport in sandy terrain);

2 machine-gun battalions motorized, with adapted tank destroyer arms, 1 company pioneers per battalion, all on armored means of transport;

1 mixed antiaircraft group (pieces from 88 and 37 mm.);

15 supply columns.

General Jodl asserts that such unit could be further modified and also widened to according of how much eventually General Funk will propose upon his return from the reconnaissance in Libya. He represents desire of the Führer that the light division comes at once to fire capacity in Libya, here where Marshal Graziani will think more opportune. Moreover he asks that the press does not speak about the movement of this division especially while they are in course the transports.

General Guzzoni illustrates, finally, the situation of our air force in Libya for the great losses endured in Cyrenaica, and signals the opportunity to locate another German air force in Libya, adding that himself has been against to displace the air forces there

Germans from the Sicily, since in such a way these would have delayed the beginning of their actions, whose necessity was urgent especially in the channel of Sicily, where, in fact, have had occasion to operate shiningly.

For the German part makes itself present that the preparation of fields is previewed the action of German airplane from Libya provided that General Guzzoni assures already in course of performance.

ITALIAN EAST AFRICA - In spite of the superiority in with of our land forces (330,000 men approximately) to those of the adversary (approximately 230,000 men), the situation in the Empire is serious is because our forces is deployed defensively on an immense fronts, without possibility of expresses movements because lack of motor vehicles, it is because the enemy has an absolute preponderance of tanks and aircraft.

In forecast of this offensive that movement from Sudan on Massawa and Gondar, and from Kenya towards Somalia with possible invasions in the former British Somalia, to Gibuti and also on the Eritrean coast, the Viceroy has predisposed the occupation of more rear positions regarding those than the border, but more better adapted, by nature than land, to contrast the action of armored forces.

Given the situation of the connections with the Empire, based on the every day shipment, of an airplane, it is not by now more possible to influence on the below operations if not in minimal measure.

DODECANESE- the islands of the Dodecanese are well prepared for defense and to await to the attack enemy that seems in preparation.

Their importance will increase the previewed hardly German action will be delineated in Thrace.

If the ability to the preparations and the possibility of supplies that will allow, the German shipment of *Stukas* would succeed there much useful in order to in motion strike especially the English convoys between Egypt and Greece.

FRANCE - the attack of Degaulist forces in the south of the Tripolitania has not been a surprise and has been contained by our garrisons. New concessions to France in the Algerian south for being able will be made to face the threats of De Gaulle. And they will be made above all since would not have the possibility to prevent transgressions in matter.

But for Corsica one does not agree to make some of the demanded concessions.

Marshal Keitel is associated totally to this point of view.

In merit to the eventual occupation of France still not occupied, the zone would not be possible to Italy to occupy all that is under its control until the Rodan.

In any case but would occupy those territories that remain within its claims.

The Marshal Keitel finds such assertion perfectly just.

Circa the issues of the control of the French communications and the freedom of the communications of our Commission of Armistice with the Delegations in the French territories, the Marshal Keitel expresses himself decidedly favorable: the two Commission of Armistice, by agreement, will demand from France the full observance of as much as establish by the Convention of Armistice in this area.

AMMUNITIONS - In ammunition fact the Italian situation is difficult especially for antiaircraft guns, for example guns of 37 and for 20, and for the hand grenades. General Jodl makes present that the issue must be presented to General Thomas in Berlin. The request is, therefore, given to General Marras because to provide for reporting them to Thomas,

COMAMDO SUPREMO
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Berchtesgaden, 20 January 1941-XIX

EXHIBIT FOR THE FÜHRER ON THE
POLITICAL-MILITARY SITUATION

1) *Alignment of the political forces in the Balkans.*

Beyond to the forces destined against Greece a strong nucleus at disposition of the Bulgarians for giving to them security towards Turkey. Another group will have to give tranquility to Romania.

For the advance into Thrace remarkable difficulties for the scarcity of communications and the presence of swampy land are previewed. In the course of the month of March it is previewed to have sufficient forces for giving protection towards Turkey and attacking Greece. Difficult the passage of the Danube is introduced, that now it is frozen and on which the constitution of the bridges demands three weeks. With the passage of the Danube it is from previewing the entrance in action of English aviation, on the points of passage and the Rumanian oil field: the Germany will have therefore to deploy many antiaircraft artilleries and much aviation, because the Rumanians are very weak in this field. The air defense of the oil fields constitutes the worrisome task.

2) *Albania.*

The presence of a German unit that does not come at once employed, while the Italians fight, would be little appreciate. Of the other part the presence of a German unit in Albania would authorize English to attack at once the Romanian oil fields. Therefore, in consideration also of the serious difficulties of transport that exist between Italy and Albania, it appears opportune to hold the forces prepared but held in case of need.

It seems much difficult one to succeed completely to remove the English from Greece, they being installed on Crete, where they can have of the good air force bases and it is practical demonstrated that the total destruction of the airports is impossible.

There is then from considering the possibility that they have English to use the Americans aircraft of great range (on the 400

km.). We must therefore count for the end of March for an English lightening attack against the area of Ploesti.

The Führer does not think the news reliable of a planned important English forces invasion at Salonico. They would risk to go in mouth to the Germans. Moreover it would be necessary for the English an important number of transport ships and the transport would have to face the attacks of the air forces of the Aegean.

With regard to this the Führer stopped to examine the possibilities that they could have German bomber units in the Aegean with Italian fighters.

3) *Russia.*

It is to premise that a serious Russian threat would be little desirable. It is true and that with the German forces to north would be possible to carry out a strongly lightening action, but serious would be the difficulties in order to maintain to a great army to the eastern front, now the sparsely of the communications.

With Russia our relationships have been regulated on the basis of the treaties, but the best guarantee is given from the presence of our troops; Stalin is intelligent and prudent, but the danger is in the fact that the Russians consider the treaties unilaterally. Therefore it is necessary to be most prudent: it is explained therefore as we assign great forces to that side.

If not there were the Russian factor all the problems they would be easy solvable in Europe. The greater danger of a Russian participation would be above all in the possibilities of Russian aviation.

4) *Turkey.*

The Führer does not believe that Turkey can attack also since is only ready in part. Moreover he knows that after 24 hours from its entrance in the war Constantinople would be destroyed by the German bombing. The greater danger is what it puts bases at disposition of the English army. But all it is legacy to the developments of the action in the West.

5) *England.*

Indispensable premise for the attack on England is the conquest of the aerial superiority. It must consider also that this action against England in case did not succeed could not be tried again. Therefore it must attend that all are taken place the indispensable conditions for success. Among this most important is that one of a minimal period of good weather (at least five days). In the last year three days of favorable weather have not ever been had. Large it will be also the contribution of the powerful deployment of German batteries on the continental coasts. Germany moreover

have the possibility of concentric attack from bases much nearer than those that it had in the last war.

However the enterprise is arduous: English will themselves strike very well since the scale of the fight is immense.

Germany is preoccupied to protect the Atlantic coast, given the presence at these of air force bases and points of support for submarines. Particularly it is preoccupied by Portugal, exposed to English dangers.

It is important to close the Strait of Sicily. Too bad that it is not possible for now to eliminate Gibraltar. If we could move to Spain, and in this the Führer asks the support for the Duce, Gibraltar sure would be conquered in a short time. The complexity of the operation would demand however time in that, also having to strengthen the capacity in the south of France, it must hold account of the delay that derives to the transports for the diversity of poverty of the Spanish railway network. And be calculated that for such transport they are necessary one score of days.

The ideal would be that this operation could be made in January-February: it would carry a easing everywhere and would allow the saving 60-80 divisions. Also the situation in France would improve to our advantage.

The Führer does not believe that there is danger of a directed participation of America. However this could not far modify the situation that delineates favorable to us, in the case of England, for the nearness of the bases, than it as an example allows us to turn upside down on London in a single aerial attack 600 tons of bombs and 600,000 incendiary bombs. The English to do anything against us is not possible.

It is utmost importance to intensify the action against the English war and commercial ships and above all against this last one since a double advantage is come true therefore: to paralyze their operations and to remove their availability of tonnage. It can in fact be renounced to all but not to the bread and the meat. In any case the decision of the war cannot come if we do not get hold of the British islands.

6) France.

In respect of France you can not see right now that exert a threat on the French government, including through the press in Paris and take advantage of the competition that exists between different trends: those of the government of Vichy, Weygand and those of those of De Gaulle.

7) *Rumania.*

In the case of Rumania the Führer asserts his confidence in General Antonescu, for how much recognizes that his work is carried out in means of serious difficulties.

8) *Italian North Africa.*

The special unit that is being prepared for Libya comes constituted holding present that the anti-tank action is essentially a psychological problem. The experience of the fight in France has demonstrated as of the anti-tank units trained well can destroy many powerful tanks even if those like the French, that they have been immobilized by making fire on the crawler tracks.

The Führer thinks that this true and own special unit will be very profitable in Libya much than major armored unit, which for their heavy composition could in any case not have reached that too much late. Instead this unit of obstruction, with elements particularly trained to the shooting against the tanks (training that it demands from 4 to 6 months of time) can render the forecasted services.

It will have to be at once engaged, since the Germans does not want that it says of they what it was said of the English in France: that they fought until the last French. It will not have to be employed in the defensive, but it must have the task to attack the enemy tanks. The same name of "panzerjager" (hunters of tanks) says which it is the task of these special troops.

The mines have also a greatest value against the tanks: they have been a lot used to the western front and have given precious results, especially here where it agreed to guarantee the safety of delineated points. The placement of the mines demands also little time: in four days to the western front they have been placed 60,000 mines. The removing it is it operates never difficult how much and it demands of the true heroes.

The Führer asks if it is not possible to carry to Tobruk mines with a small steamboat or submarine. Marshal Keitel declares itself disposed to place at the disposition, in case hasten, behind simple telegraphic request.

The Führer insists on the importance of the Derna-Mechili front, that it must at all costs be held. Also in the cares of the issue of Gibraltar and France it has much importance to maintain the Italian positions in Libya, that they could constitute bases for eventual actions towards the west.

SUPERMARINA

10 February 1941 - XIX

Memorandum N. 31 for the convention of Merano

I

GEOGRAPHICAL - STRATEGIC SITUATION

1. At the end of the month of November 1940 the geographic-strategic relativity between Italy and England was remaining in the Mediterranean substantially that determined after the armistice with France. This situation could be considered favorable, in as much as the main bases of the adversary (Gibraltar and Alexandria), situated to the extremities of the basins of the Mediterranean, for their same eccentricity, did not offer to the enemy wide possibility of maneuver in the focal zone of the central Mediterranean, where the position of Malta was sufficiently neutralized in order to prevent that could serve the English as an important operating base. In these conditions remain unchanged the importance of the strategic position of the Channel of Sicily: it, as a geographic element of separation between the eastern basin and the western one of the Mediterranean, granted to our Navy the possibility of strategic maneuver even when the control of the Channel could not be maintained in rigorous and continuous way.

2. In November last the geographic-strategic situation in the Mediterranean was varied. The English naval and aerial forces have had in fact the possibility to install themselves at Crete, in the islands of the Aegean and the numerous usable positions along the coasts of Greece. The position of the Dodecanese, which had already seen reduced its own importance for the difficulties of supply, has turned out devaluated further, while was increasing the threat of a direct offensive action to eliminate it. But, above all, the enemy has been able to overcome the geographic-strategic inferiority, to which the availability of the single eccentric base of Alexandria granted to them in the eastern Mediterranean, and he has had the possibility of launch their own sea and air attacks in to the central Mediterranean, and in particular to the Ionian: it therefore has acquired remarkable potential abilities is against the naval and aerial bases of southern Italy, as well as against the military lines of traffic in the Lower Adriatic.

3. The beginning of the offensive against the English Libya and its rapid unforeseen developments have now (which took occupation of Cyrenaica) created a further escalation in the situation in the Mediterranean geographical and strategic. The basis of Tobruk passed away; the enemy will have a short time also the port of Benghazi. The two pillars of access to the eastern Mediterranean are in possession of the naval and air forces of the adversary; the central Mediterranean, where so far the enemy had only precarious foothold of Malta, is controlled by its eastern bastion and partly from the southern.

This situation, in addition to inhibit virtually any serious offensive threat on the part of our naval and air forces against the British positions in the eastern Mediterranean, subject to the control and especially naval air England the central Mediterranean; Serious efforts are needed to retain control even limited the Sicilian Channel, in order to hinder as much as possible the free use of that passage to the benefit of supply convoys and naval forces of the enemy.

4. But unfortunately it must be envisaged the possibility that the enemy will be able to extend their occupation even to Tripoli. Leaving aside for a moment the political and military consequences of this event in respect of the attitude of France and North Africa.

By limiting the analysis to the full employment effects of Libya on geographic-strategic situation in the Mediterranean, it appears that the completion of the occupation of the southern shores of the Mediterranean will lead to the unblocking of the central Sicilian Channel by the opponent. These, taking advantage of their positions and the superiority of vessels and aircraft, will always be able to play with great freedom of action its traffic between the extremes of the Mediterranean basins, as intense will be our efforts to hamper their free use of the waters of the Strait of Sicily.

5. From what is above that in recent months the situation of war-strategic geography of Italy in the Mediterranean has undergone a profound change, going from being quite favorable to a condition of net disadvantage, which appears significantly worse even than to that existing at the beginning of the war, when the potential French maritime flanked the British.

The profound transformation of the geographic-strategic situation in the Mediterranean is the consequence The fact that the concentration of all the means and all the offensive power of the British Empire against the Italian colonial empire, still young and not fully prepared: action against Greece was precisely started with the objective of neutralizing a priori the effects of this very serious looming threat, recovering in part

north of the eastern Mediterranean and in the eastern part of the Ionian an part of the freedom of action, which feared was lost with the positions of North Africa.

Only the conquest of the coast of Greece and the Aegean islands (including Crete) will indeed redress the situation, on the one hand allowing the resumption of offensive actions against the Eastern Mediterranean and offering on the other side the opportunity to attack the side lines Mediterranean trade of Britain, threatening them in the section between Sardinia and their landing points.

6. It mentioned the possible political consequences and military occupation of Libya integral part of England and established territorial contiguity between the lands occupied by British troops and the French territories of North Africa. The military implications of a changed political attitude of France invest two sets of elements: strategic and naval forces. The contribution of the latter, given the very wide concessions made to France by the Commission of Armistice (against which the Italian Navy has never failed to raise the most serious objections and the most energetic protests), is very significant, especially in the field forces torpedo and the ship underwater. It would be truly regrettable that the Axis powers were to be again faced with substantial groups of naval forces, reorganized and restored to efficiency with their own consent.

But the repercussions more deplorable and more ruinous would be those arising from the renewed availability of geographic locations, such as those in North Africa and Corsica. The Gulf of Genoa and of Tirreno would again seriously threatened and should be defended with air and naval forces (surface and underwater), taken away from other sectors: the Sicilian Channel would be under the complete control enemy: the enemy pressure on Italy, from east to west, it would assume such gravity that it can not be compensated even by the re-establishment of the situation in Greece and the Aegean.

7. The concentration of British imperial forces and means against Italian positions in Africa has also canceled the benefits, in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, from the position of Massawa, flanking lines of British traffic in the Red Sea, and from the oceanic base of Chimayo. From these positions it had been so far operated on the enemy within the limits allowed by the few light forces of surface and diving available and the limitations imposed by particular climatic conditions. The British offensive under way against A.O.I. He has already obliged to provide for the evacuation of Chimayo and laid Massawa in a safe condition very precarious.

II
WAR ECONOMY and LINES OF TRAFFIC

8. Italy, despite the almost total cessation of its international maritime traffic, traffic that has kept the need to undertake any vessel which is found in the Mediterranean at the outbreak of hostilities.

And in fact:

a) The coastal movement, both in the Tyrrhenian Sea in the Adriatic has been intensified in relation to the geography of the peninsula and the need to integrate the longitudinal rail traffic, already absorbed much for other reasons.

b) The import of coal and minerals from Sardinia creates a significant current of ships across the Tyrrhenian Sea.

c) The need for military and civilians of Libya gave rise to an intense stream of traffic in both directions, which took place and is taking place without interruption along the Sicilian Channel and along the coasts of ASI for a length (up to recent times) of about 1200 miles.

d) The needs of war in Albania have created a new and impressive stream of traffic, which, as you play on very short way, is very expensive.

But all these trades do not give any contribution to the reserves of liquid fuels and raw materials that exist in the country; the Navy operates consuming their inventories, which are not relevant and impose restrictions on the use of forces.

9. This state of affairs has produced two consequences:

a) The requirements of traffic forced to gradually increase the amount of escort services, which, after absorbing armed merchant ships provided for this purpose and obsolete torpedo boats, have subsequently requested the use of modern torpedo boats and destroyers of the escorts, to the detriment of other tasks of a military nature;

b) In the British Navy (surface vessels -submarines - air forces) we are offered several important objectives of attack, dispersed over a very extensive area.

10. From the point of view of the war, the British situation in the Mediterranean is as follows:

a) The principal position of Egypt has so far been fueled mainly via the Red Sea.

b) Until the beginning of the operations against Greece, England had kept some traffic, as very limited extent, between the Aegean and Alexandria, with periodic small convoys, whose transfer coincided with the formation of convoys to Malta

accordingly few steamers locally formed, and was always protected by the bulk of the British fleet at sea.

c) They had not, until November 1940, almost occurred passes through the Strait of Sicily convoys (or merchant ships) direct from the western Mediterranean to the east or vice versa; the few transfers took place were referring to military units, protected by heavy nuclei of battleships from east and west.

d) The opening of hostilities with Greece produced the intensification of trade between Egypt and the Aegean, resting them to create any bases in Greece, and led England to try the passage of the Strait of Sicily by of important convoys of troops and materials, which have been located by naval and aerial surveillance to the Canal Zone.

e) The operations taking place in North Africa have already created a significant current of coastal traffic from Egypt to the west, for the rapid replenishment of the troops operating from the sea.

f) It is likely that the new geo-strategic situation created by the occupation all or part of Libya, will lead England to take advantage of the most favorable circumstances to give a development increasing the passage of convoys from the western Mediterranean to the central and Eastern Europe through the Strait of Sicily, especially as it implies a very strong economy in the use of merchant shipping, the economy which certainly Britain feels the need.

11. In conclusion, with regard to the war economy, the situation in the Mediterranean is quite different from that in the Atlantic, where Britain has the most goals and vitally, while Germany does not have traffic lines essential. Here Italy has traffic lines militarily and economically very important, while Britain had for a long time virtually stopped all traffic: only recently been created currents of movement, which will certainly growing, but that can not be defined by marketing character, since, for their own characteristics, they will always look subsidiary military and, as such, it will certainly be covered by operations under the departments more British.

III

RELATIVITY OF THE FORCES

12. Always neglecting the initial period of the war, when France was still belligerent, the examination of the relativity of the naval forces in its different phases leads to the following conclusions:

a) From the beginning the Italian fleet has fulfilled its intended function of setting, by the very fact of its size and its

location, a core of the opposing forces of power far greater than his own;

b) regarding the battleships, one can calculate that the Italian fleet has always bound by 6 to 7 units similar to the opponents, that virtually all the efficient battleships of the *Warspite* class and a part of the battleships of the *Resolution* class or of the battle cruisers; relativity of forces in this field has grown from a inferiority manifests in early (when there were only two *Cavour*) to a state of progressive balance (related to increasing combat effectiveness of two *Littorio* and of the two *Duilio*), damaged in November for effect the hit in action by an English aero- torpedo in the Gulf of Taranto, which has removed three of our battleships for a period of several months.

However, the British Navy is always forced to keep immobilized two centers of power, one in Gibraltar and one in Alexandria, each of which is commensurate with the need to face alone the battle with our battleships;

c) the initial Italian superiority in cruisers and less markedly in the destroyers has been gradually shrinking because Britain was able, thanks to the almost complete dismantling of the station of the Far East and the entry into service of new units, strengthen its thin and light forces in the Mediterranean, both quantitatively and qualitatively;

d) in the field of aircraft carriers we can not unfortunately speak of relativity of forces, but only to find that 3 to 4 aircraft carriers are stationed in a manner now permanently to the Mediterranean;

e) as relates to submarines, it is well known that the cessation of any traffic in the Mediterranean, the forms taken by war in this sea and the consequent lack of objectives susceptible to absorb the mass of our underwater vessels, as well as the availability of a Based on the French coast of the Atlantic, they have led to the decision to send the Italian unit into the Atlantic ocean, leaving only the units in the Mediterranean antiquated and modern ones of lesser displacement.

The British submarines engaged in the Mediterranean were not very numerous in the past: they were needed, however, frequent submissions of new units by the Motherland due to the relatively large losses suffered by them (11 proven and another 3-4 probable); Recently they were instead increased significantly.

f) in short, the rise of the British forces in the Mediterranean during the first six months of conflict appears from the comparison between the two following charts:

SITUATION ENGLISH NAVAL FORCES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

1st July 1940					
	BB	Cruiser	CV	DD	SS
The Western Mediterranean	2	2	1	20	1
The Eastern Mediterranean	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>7</u>
Total (Mediterranean)	6	9	2	36	8
1st February 1941					
The Western Mediterranean	3	2	2	20	12
The Eastern Mediterranean	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>9</u>
Total (Mediterranean)	6	17	4	47	21

g) our losses in all the theaters of operations, counting also those for incidents of navigation and other causes, are the following (excluding the BB.):

- 1 cruiser of 5,000 tons;
- 9 naval destroyer;
- 4 modern torpedo boats;
- 3 antiquated torpedo boats;
- 22 submarines.

The British Navy has endured the following assessed losses:

- 2-3 cruisers;
- 7 naval destroyer;
- 14-15 submarines;
- 3 patrol boats.

Significant damage was inflicted on us: 3 battleships, two aircraft carriers, 6 cruisers, five destroyers, 7 submarines.

13. *Air forces*

Mention is made of the air force only in relation to their use in the maritime war.

There has been an Italian Air Force inferiority in air-naval, for the following reasons, dependent on factors largely beyond the competence of the Navy:

- a) lack of reconnaissance aircraft of large range of the type of Sunderland;
- b) strong deficiency in the quantity and quality of our maritime reconnaissance aircraft, which is insufficient for the daily needs and not able to withstand the fighter aircraft departing from the CVs;
- c) limited offensive efficiency of the national aero-torpedo units in comparison with those enemies, as they have

better torpedoes; the fact comes from our units still being set up and training;

d) impossibility of being able to rely on safe aviation bomber, for reasons of a general nature (addiction -assignment of tasks) and Specific (difficulty of adequate recognition -munitions failure);

e) inability of national aviation fighter to operate on the high seas;

f) lack of aircraft carriers that allow you to control the aircraft from enemy fighters and bombers, such as aircraft carriers control our enemy and push the reconnaissance in extreme sectors of the Mediterranean waters of enemy bases. This deficiency has become more felt with the loss of the air bases of Cyrenaica.

The arrival in Italy of the German X Air Corps with the main task of the aero-marine has brought a heartfelt improvement to the situation, above all in respect of actions against enemy naval activity.

However, it remains still felt deficiency in the field of maritime reconnaissance.

IV

METHOD OF USE OF NAVAL FORCES

14. Detailed rules for the use of naval forces in the Mediterranean area have been determined by the following elements, which have come hand by hand and stating:

a) exist so far for us poor and limited strategic objectives for partial operations;

b) the enemy unaccountability is under operations warfare against our lines of communication, which could inflict heavy losses, but to offer the right to counter-attack operations;

c) the enemy, in his sorties to sea, always has a core of superior ships to the Italian forces that may occur; as evidenced by the care with which, first of all his sorties, run explorations on all national naval bases, to meter consequently the amount of its operating units.

15. From the foregoing, and from experience, it appears that:

a) attempts to perform offensive actions in the sphere of action of our means with isolated units of cruisers, destroyers, Mas have always fallen on void, because normally there are no steamers, isolated or in convoy, or detached enemy units;

b) when such attempts do not fall on deaf ears, it is because the enemy naval forces are in motion, and then, given the characteristics of the theater of operations, you can not think of actions likely to bring real results if you are ready and capable of opposing mass to mass;

c) conditions of employment of naval forces in the Mediterranean area are so significantly different, if not opposed, to those existing in the Atlantic theater of operations, as there are various strategic assumptions;

d) it is possible that in the near future, for the reasons given above, to create conditions more conducive to offensive actions of smaller units, but such a possibility, as the result of the worsened situation geographic strategy, will be offset in its effects from changes strategic situation. Constant pressure will be given instead of the active presence of the Italian fleet, which, as he does today, will not fail never one moment, in which the enemy is at sea, to go out and try to engage him in favorable terms;

e) requires to be realistic in assessing the conditions for engaging because, if any success on the enemy mass would have huge moral repercussions, material effects but relatively limited (given the ability of the enemy to replace units lost with other from other sectors and the lack of effects on marine traffic), a failure of the Italian naval forces would have the most serious impact on the situation in the land fronts operating overseas, which could be cut off from the mother country, with all the consequences;

f) however the basic premise to engage enemy units in favorable conditions is the ability to always know, with certainty and continuity, their position, their power, their movements, which in the present state of things is not obtainable;

g) it is also necessary to keep active and efficient control of the Strait of Sicily, to preserve the integrity of the subdivision of the Mediterranean, and to make more risky transit through the Canal itself. This need is countered by the very absorption of light units for escort services; can not easy to find a satisfactory solution to the problem;

h) with regard to the undersea boat, it was found that in the Mediterranean, for the clarity of the water and the atmosphere, for the size of the theater of operations that allow the air traffic control in a persistent and complete, for the air superiority of opponent, to the possibilities offered to the methodical investigation and the torpedo boats specially

specially equipped, the daytime use of the submarine offensive against naval formations, usually escorted, does not give a return commensurate with the risk. The underwater action is set in the Mediterranean on the use at night, which also offers good prospects for success only in the areas of obliged passage and when the enemy passes through it.

V

OPERATING POSSIBILITIES'

The Italian fleet can continue to perform as in the past, the task to tie down in the Mediterranean important enemy naval forces, even in the worst case of total loss of Libya.

In this eventuality, as well as ensuring communications with Albania and along the national coasts, it may act offensively against the English trans-Mediterranean traffic and against naval forces intended for defense.

If Tripoli can be preserved, the aim of defending the communications of this with the Motherland will present great difficulties because they can act against naval and air forces supported in Cyrenaica and because the port of Tripoli will be subjected to frequent air strikes .

The security of communications with Albania is linked to the ability to successfully conclude the war with Greece, compensating with the conquest of the Greek bases the loss of Libyan positions and re-evaluating the Dodecanese.

However, not to live up to its mandate, the Italian fleet needs:

- a) take security in its location in its main operating bases (Taranto -Augusta-Naples-Messina) with light units permanently or occasionally located in Palermo, Trapani and Cagliari;
- b) check with aviation movements of the enemy in port and at sea.

The relocation of the fleet in the southern bases is all the more necessary in that, with the loss of Cyrenaica, decreased considerably the ability to control the movement of enemy forces during their march from Alexandria to the west, and therefore the timely intervention can not be obtained that approaching ships to enemy lines operation.

The base best located would be Augusta, but its proximity to Malta prohibits the use for the main force, while Malta will not be effectively neutralized.

The more the Italian fleet will maintain operational capabilities, the lower the oceans availability of British forces.

VI
NECESSITY OF COOPERATION
FROM PART OF GERMANY

That the activities mentioned above can be executed with a degree of intensity that ensures the effective cooperation is needed to meet the allied deficiencies which can not cope with the nation's resources, deficiencies that from what has been exposed are essentially of means anti-aircraft defense of the bases, aircraft for surveillance over the Mediterranean, liquid fuels and raw materials and semi-finished products for new construction.

The aid in question results in the following order of magnitude:

a) antiaircraft means: They are being built by the domestic industry numerous artillery and anti-aircraft machine guns; their production is slow for various reasons. It should be able to have as soon as possible, even in the temporary transfer of about 25 anti-aircraft batteries and about 100 anti-aircraft guns bore not inferior than 20 mm, for assurance base defense. It would take further means of auscultation aero-phonc, stations and power grids shooting for the weapons themselves.

b) reconnaissance seaplanes to large radius: for supervision assurance off the enemy bases and routes of transit in the Mediterranean is likely to require an availability of approximately 50 aircraft to take account of shifts and repairs;

c) liquid fuels: the monthly consumption of fuel oil in the Italian Navy, while taking account of rigid economies, is around 100,000 tons.

The reserves are modest.

It is therefore necessary to maximize the share of fuels that Italy already receives from Romania, and that is now used exclusively for civilian purposes and the Army;

d) Raw materials and semi-finished products: factors relating to these requests shall be supplied separately.

The Italian Navy knows that the acceptance of these requests, which agree in principle with those already submitted to the Conference of Friedrichshafen is outside the direct competence of the *Oberkommando*; but it begs him again to intervene because it is conscious of practical impossibility to carry out his function, so important in the big picture of the war, if you can not have all the resources that are needed.

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Il maresciallo dell'Aria Italo Balbo Governatore della Libia.

Air Marshal Italo Balbo Governor of Libya



Il maresciallo d'Italia Rodolfo Graziani Comandante Superiore Forze Armate A.S.

Marshal of Italy Rodolfo Graziani, Supreme Commander Armed Forces N.A.



Il Generale Archibald P. Wavell comandante in capo del Medio Oriente.

General Archibald P. Wavell, Commander in Chief Middle East



Il Generale Italo Gariboldi comandante della 5^a armata.

General Italo Gariboldi Commander of the 5th Army



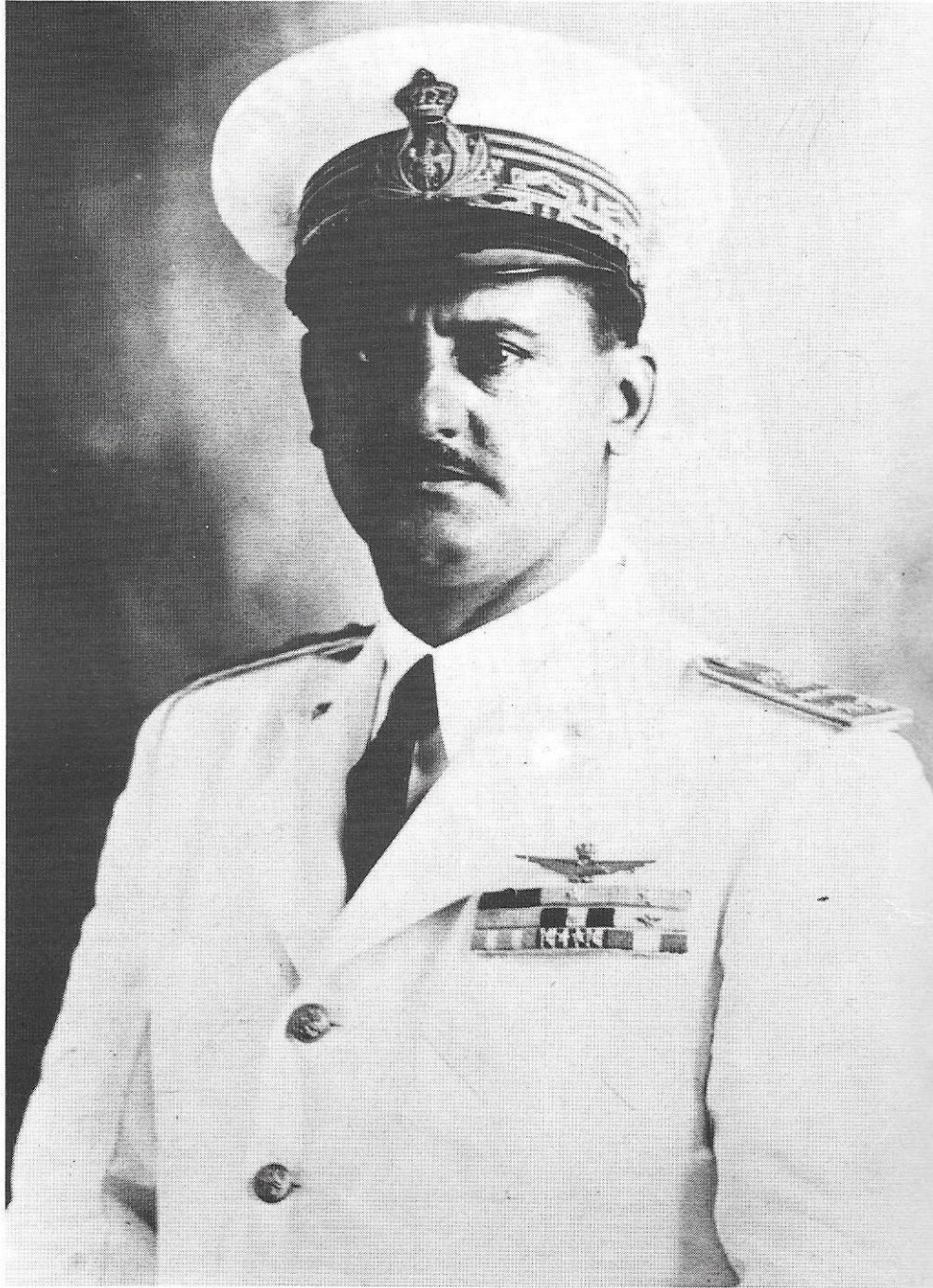
Il Generale Mario Berti comandante della 10^a armata.

General Mario Berti Commander of the 10th Army



Il Generale Giuseppe Tellera ultimo comandante della 10^a armata.

General Giuseppe Tellera, the last commander of the 10th Army



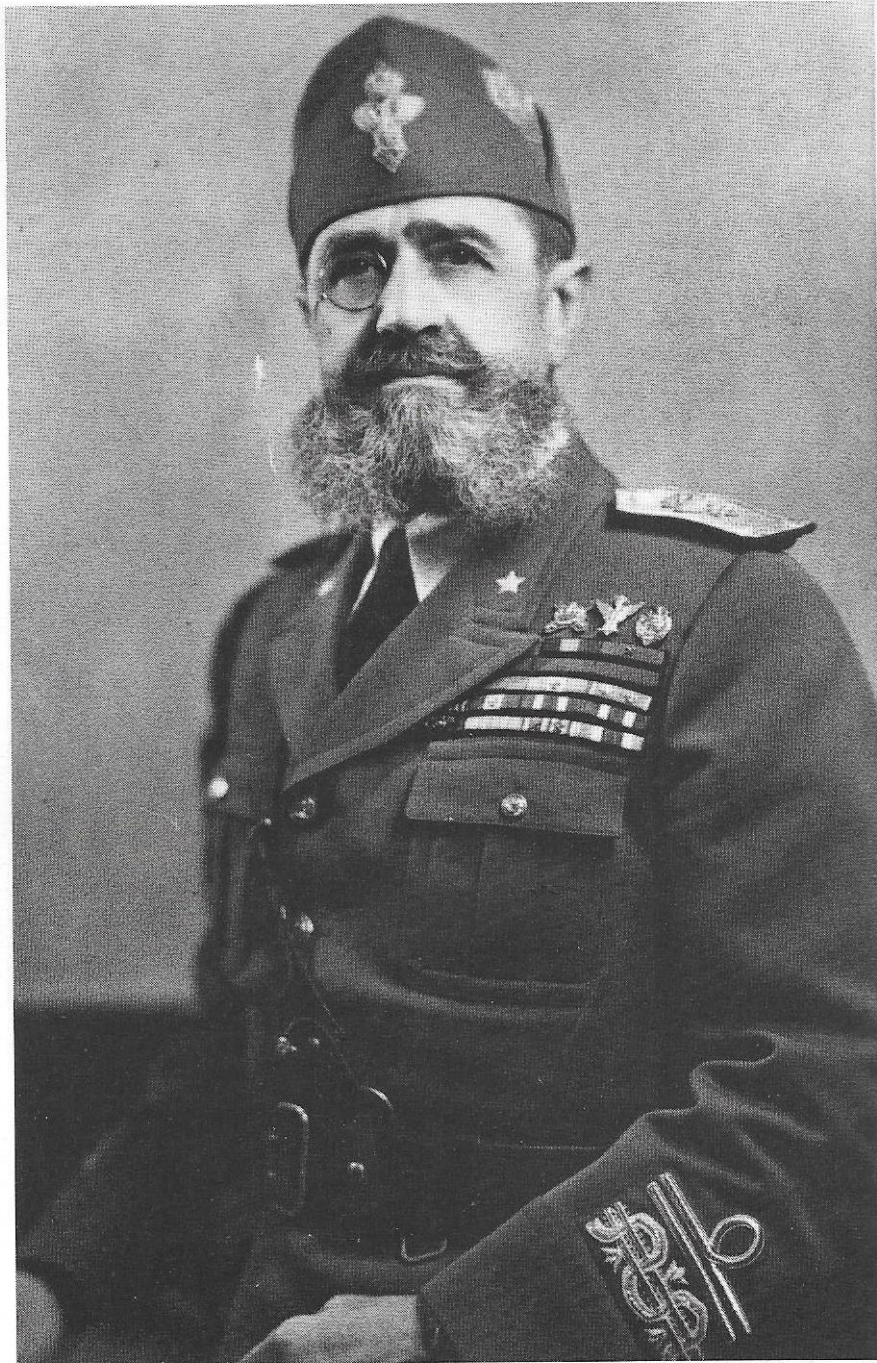
Il Generale Felice Porro, comandante la 5^a Squadra Aerea.

General Felice Porro, Commander of the 5th Air Fleet



Il Generale Annibale Bergonzoli comandante del XXIII Corpo d'armata.

General Annibale Bergonzoli, Commander of the XXIII Army Corps.



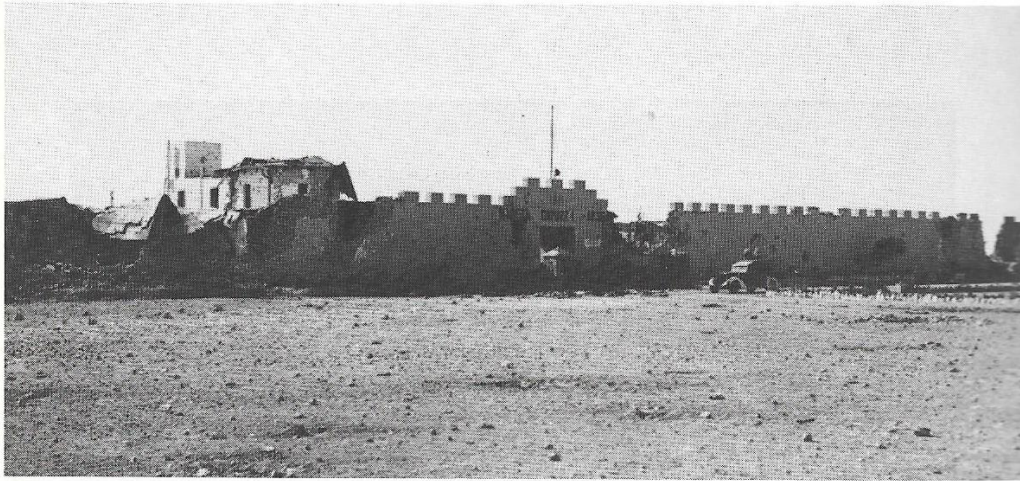
Il Generale Sebastiano Gallina comandante del gruppo divisioni libiche.

General Sebastiano Gallina, commander of the Libyan Division Corp



Il Generale Pietro Maletti comandante del raggruppamento Maletti.

General Pirtro Maletti, commander of the Maletti Battle Group



La ridotta Capuzzo



La baia di Sollum vista dal passo Halfaya.



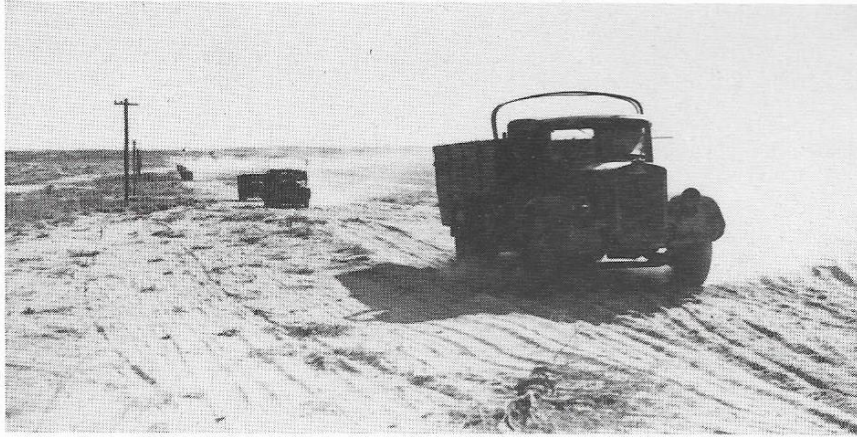
Sollum bassa ed il suo golfo.



Lavori per prolungare la strada asfaltata verso Sidi el Barrani.

Top: Fort Capuzzo, Center Left: Halfaya pass; Center Right: Lower Sollum & the Gulf;
Bottom Workers on the road to Sadi el Barrani

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Autocolonna nel deserto della Marmarica.

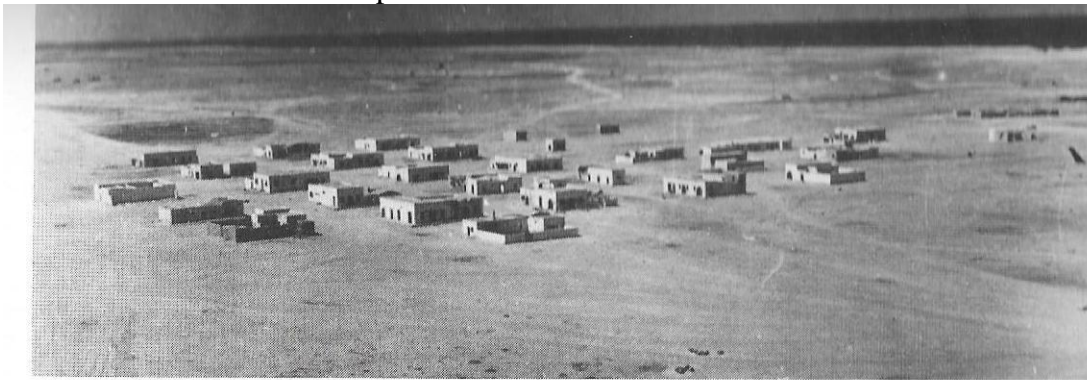


Autocolonna sulla Via Balbia.

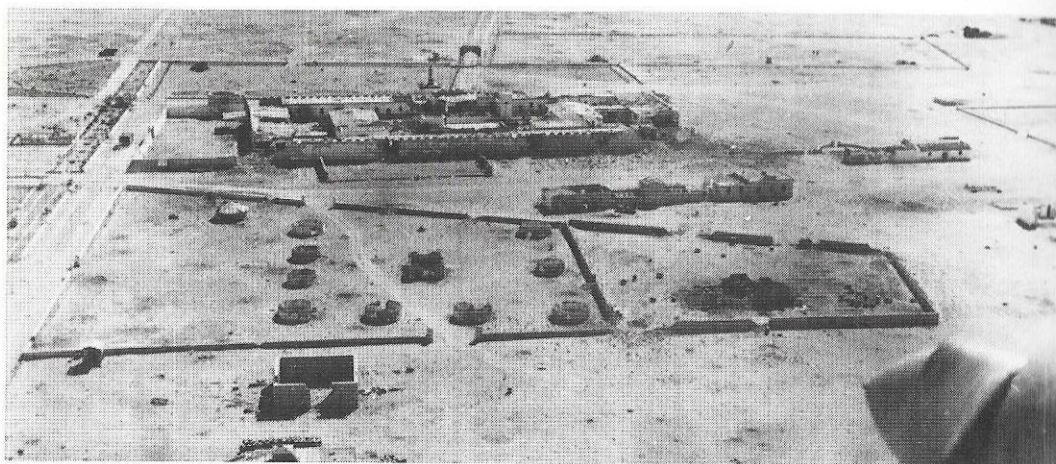


I caterpillar.

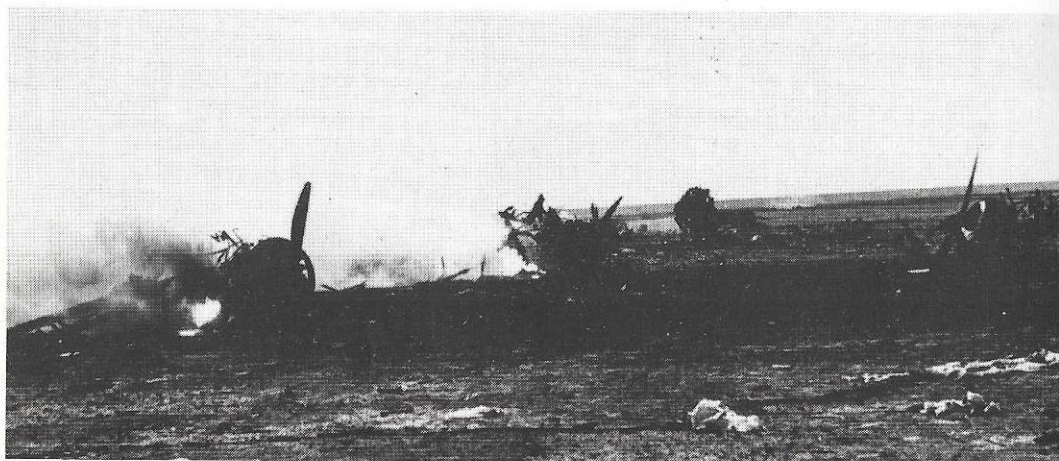
Top: Truck convoy in the Marmarican desert; Center: Truck Convoy on the via Balbia;
Bottom A Catepillar



Sidi el Barrani – Il centro abitato.



Sidi el Barrani – Il fortino.



Resti di aerei distrutti al suolo da un bombardamento della RAF.

Top: Sidi el Barrani, village center; Center: Sidi el Barrani, the Fort; Bottom: Remains of a Aircraft destroyed by RAF bombing



Attendamento del battaglione Sahariano del raggr. Maletti.



Trinceramenti del raggr. Maletti.

Top: Men of the Saharan Regiment of the Maletti BG; Bottom: Trenches of the Maletti BG



Batteria contraerea da 75/46 in postazione.



Bardia – Pezzo contraereo da 75/46 in azione.

Top: 75/46 Ant-Aircraft Battery in position, Bottom: 75/46 anti-aircraft gun in action